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The Restoration

Keith Henderson

A Thesis

in

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ABSTRACT

The Restoration

Keith Henderson

The major thematic interests of the work are the corrosive effects of the ideologies of the time -- political, psychological -- their dislocation of marriages, families, ultimately of communities. The novel is set in pre-Referendum Quebec, during the six months from December 1979 to June 1980. The subject is broadly political. Nevertheless, the novel's focus is on architecture and the politics of urban restoration, the central motif an historic building discovered by a young student of architectural history. The building houses a decaying Anglo concern that has chosen to lock out its workers; its façade conceals the original walls, intact for the most part, of an important architectural remnant of the French régime in the city of Montreal, the Couvent des Récollets, the protagonist, Gilbert Rollins' discovery of this fact leading to the company's destroying the building by arson to avoid classification as an historic site and to expedite a move out of the province. Paradoxically, the fire leaves the walls and design of the original structure fully apparent for the first time.

Part One: Winter, 1980

When Gilbert Rollins arrived for Christmas that year, his mother told him she was leaving, this time for good. "I've always told Pam that she'd have to look out for herself, since Father and I weren't permanent. But she's found herself a really *good* husband. Randy is just suited for her."

Gilbert nodded. The proper response to this was a depressed, business-like blankness.

"So what will you do?"

"We're putting the house up for sale. Father doesn't want to, of course, but I think he'll realize now."

"Realize what?"

"Oh, just the way things are."

Mrs. Rollins was dabbing her nose with powder. She was on her way to her meeting with her doctor, a neighborhood G.P. turned family counsellor. She was excited, almost cockily excited, dressed in her lime green pants and her little Swiss fedora with the feather in the brim.

"I want you to know I feel very guilty about taking away Norm's

house. It means so much to him, but Dr. Boll said, 'You've *worked* for that house. That's part of *your* savings,' and I went home and after I thought about it I said to myself, 'He's *right*. *I* certainly didn't get any pension raising three kids. And god knows your father's won't go very far. I wouldn't be able to take any of *that*."

Gilbert nodded again. "Have you told Father?" he finally asked.

Mrs. Rollins fumbled in her purse for her lipstick, then started to apply it carefully to her lips. When she finished she put it back.

"Dr. Boll said I shouldn't spoil his Christmas. He looks forward to being with his family and I..."

She broke off, mashing up a kleenex in her hand.

"Don't tell him about this, please?"

"Alright," said Gilbert. He stayed in the bathroom until he heard his mother's car start in the driveway.

Norm Rollins, 66, was a decent, faithful sort of taxpayer, father of three, also among the most mule-headed, narrowminded of people, so temper-choked the purple veins would pop out on his forehead and so pedantic he'd once decided that sugar should be pronounced 'soo-gar' and proceeded to do so in polite company. For forty-two years he'd been bookkeeper, then Treasurer of Mercer and Granville, Printing and Wholesale Stationers, for twenty-nine cuckold to various acquaintances, including Josh Whitmore, an overwrought baritone with the United Church choir where Adele sang. Norm never knew about that one. The one he remembered best was the mortician at Wheatley's in Adele's organ playing days. When Norm was bringing her home from Cornwall, Ontario (the mortician had gotten cold feet), she threatened

to throw herself out of the car.

Forgive and forget. Norm Rollins was an expert forgetter. He brought stacks of work home in brown paper bundles tied up with a cord: He draped himself in front of the television and punched home *Les Canadiens* to Cup after Cup with little nervous spasms in his forearm. He took it out on the French, on the labour unions, on his kids, while Adele spent. That was part of the deal. If she came back, he didn't watch her like a hawk, especially with her own money. She bought floor-coverings, new furniture, an organ that cost her $5289 (plus installation). She went to Europe with him, and when he didn't want to go any more, she went by herself. Bermuda in the winter — one summer, England and France. She tried to get him to move to Australia, but more and more Norm became like a barnacle. He'd retreat to the basement where he'd been despatched with his television. Sometimes, on Saturdays, he was down there from two in the afternoon till midnight.

"How's Mother?" Gilbert asked him during the low point of a clinchy ten-round welterweight bout.

Norm didn't answer, but he had a little frozen look to him that meant he'd heard and was trying to dredge up something suitably terse. Then he started nodding his head. With Norm that was always a sign that he was about to say less than he meant.

"Getting worse, I think."

"Oh?" But if Gilbert expected more out of him, he was mistaken.

"Getting worse," Norm said again.

Gilbert waited a little. Then, when it was clear his father was not going to say anything more, he said: "What do you mean, exactly?"

Norm Rollins finally looked away from the television set. "Your mother's not a well woman," he said, pursing his lips. This had been hard for him. He started nodding again. "Not a well woman." For him, that was that.

Not that he didn't have a right to feel the way he did. She was sick. It made things simpler. Menopause, maybe, though Norm never went into details. He liked to keep things to himself, play it close to the vest. The truth was, with his two sons away, the family had turned medical-manqué, Adele first and foremost. Before her 'therapy,' she had had everything possible removed — gall bladder, ovaries, disc, knee cartilage. Name it; it was gone. She kept an amateur medical library for self-diagnosis. "If I had it to do over again, I'd have studied medicine," she often boasted. In her own mind she was half way to her degree already. Then Randy made *the connection.* Louis Randolph de Geer — (that was how he signed his name in his text-books), now the favourite son, doggy-eyed Randy, *sympatico*, a student of sympathy, (his specialty, Modern Counselling Techniques.) He suggested her operations were, in fact, cries for help, please for understanding, which he put down to a need for 'nurtural stimuli.' When Adele mentioned this to Dr. Boll, he concurred wholeheartedly. The entire focus of his treatments shifted. Henceforth, in depth analysis. Randy's stock soared. Adele Rollins was 'not a well woman.'

"And how's the strike going?" Gilbert called over.

"By Jesus! Did you see that? Jumping jimminy, he's got him!" One of the soggy welterweights had tagged the other with a left to the chin.

"That's it! That's it!"

A right cross and a left to the midriff sent his opponent to one knee. A clanging of bells, managers jumping into the ring —

"They've stopped it. They've stopped the fight," the announcer declared. "At 1:28 of the sixth round, a punishing combination of body blows..."

"What was that you said?"

"I said how's the strike going?"

Norm watched the replay and started nodding his head to himself again. Then he said, "Bastards!" (Norm liked to spit that word through his teeth.) "Those bastards'll learn a lesson."

"Who?"

"*Who?* The riff-raff! The Frenchmen! And the jokers trying to organize 'em. The whole kit 'n kaboodle. They won't get far with the place locked tight."

"You locking them out?"

"Damn right we are. Monday morning."

When Norm left that Monday morning it was to 'keep the bastards in line,' the high point of his 42 years. A year or so from retirement, it was vindication. He had a bantam look to him as he ate his porridge.

"You'll phone the rent-a-van, won't you?" Adele called out as he brushed his teeth.

Norm didn't answer.

"Norm?"

Norm was fetching his fedora down from the hall cupboard with busy

little sighs. He was on his way to work. Adele had never quite understood that as he did.

"Norm?"

Then he was putting on his rubbers at the back door. He picked up his briefcase. "A lot to do today," he finally said and whisked out.

"It's like the time I wanted him to move to Ottawa," his mother said to Gilbert out of nowhere. "I begged him to move from here. But no. He wasn't moving from head office. He was going to be president. *President*! I told him they never cared about what he did for them. But he'd bring work home and bring work home. Never see his children. Never have time for anything."

Adele mashed up another kleenex.

"Then I told him to change jobs, go somewhere where they'd see what he was doing. I told him Fern Greenaway had seen the writing on the wall in 1949, after the war. He knew they only cared about family in that firm. And he's earning twice as much as your father."

She was always on the verge of tears whenever she talked this way, fidgiting about, playing with her teaspoon, trying to keep calm.

"Dr. Boll says I should have a trial separation, but the way I'm feeling, hell, I might just as well have a divorce. The only thing that scares me is the house."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know if he's prepared to sell. Or maybe he just won't give me my half."

"Oh, come on."

"You don't know Norm."

Adele got up from the table.

"He can be vindictive."

Adele Rollins usually held her Christmas meal on Christmas day. This year Randy and Pam had the other parents to visit, so Adele had to be content with Christmas Eve, second best in her books. It also meant that Lowell, her eldest son, and his wife Brenda would definitely not be able to come, though that was just as well for Adele. Brenda did volunteer work in a hospital and had more lurid medical stories to tell than a brain surgeon. Adele always felt herself outdone.

As for Gilbert, he would simply have to put up with a whole evening of doggy-eyed Randy padding around in his negative gravity Earthboots. The heels were lower than the toes (Randy was fond of pointing out) and so contributed to a sense of restfulness and repose. Spiritboots. Nirvana boots. Gilbert was tempted to tell him that he'd read in the *Globe and Mail* they were the worst things for the human posture ever invented, but he decided he didn't want any fights. He ignored Randolph; Randolph ignored him. It was the best policy, though god knows it was difficult.

"It moved! There! I think that was it, Pam."

"No it *wasn't*, Randy."

"I think it was, Pam."

"*Ran*-dy, don't you think I would know?"

Randy had his ear down to his wife's stomach on the living-room chesterfield listening for foetal movements. Pam was four months pregnant. He had a self-consciously soft voice as he talked, carefully

enunciated and calm, as though everything in this world of magic were delicate and on the verge of collapse and so had to be wrapped up in cotton batting.

"It was like the tiniest thump on the left side. There! There it is again."

"I think you're imagining things, Randy."

"Well, you know what Nukovski says, Pam."

This quietened her immediately.

"Gee, do you think that's it?"

Gilbert noticed that they did this often in company, drop names at each other to give anyone else in the room the impression that what was going on there was extremely important. For the life of him he was not going to ask who Nukovski was.

"Well, come *on*! Come *on*!" gushed Adele. "Don't keep us in suspense. Tell us who Nukovski is! What did he say?"

Randolph gave her a look of exquisitely mixed pleasure and condescension.

"Nukovski is a parapsychologist, Mother. He's suggesting a theory whereby changes as to personal aura coincide with the first movements of the foetus. I was telling Pam this morning that I had noticed certain changes as to her development..."

He let this trail off into thin air.

"What sort of changes in aura?"

"They're usually colour changes. Blues to red."

"To pinks," chided Pam.

"No, I think it's to reds, Pam."

"Borgia thought it was to reds. Nukovski said to pinks."

"Oh, well, perhaps you're right."

"I just find this so fascinating," Adele said to Gilbert.

He nodded discreetly.

Randolph gave Mother a Ouija board for Christmas. Adele wasn't particularly pleased. She liked expensive kitchen gadgets, perfumes, and other signs of affection. To make matters worse, she'd been outdone in the size and number of gifts. Norm sat with four; Gilbert the same; Adele with a pile that usually took her longer than anyone else, but this year Randy's and Pam's covered a whole chesterfield, box after box.

"You wouldn't know that Randy got a new job this year," Pam said by way of self-deprecation.

Randolph had bought his wife a post-pregnancy dress, though she wasn't fussy about the colour. Pam had bought him a leatherbound edition of Carl Jung and an obscure, but, judging from the reaction, much-revered opus on poltergeists. Pam and Randy were also firm believers in open displays of affection. Each gift was accompanied by a lot of cuddling and orchestrated smooching which reached a climax with the large green box on the corner of the sofa dutifully reserved for the last.

"What's in this, Pam?"

Flushed, radiant, Randolph shook the box.

"Open it and see."

It was a note. "Look under the carpet near the T.V."

"Oh, isn't this fun!" said Adele, perking up.

Another note said: "Top of the coat cupboard." Another: "Behind

the yellow vase in the basement."

"In the *base*-ment," squealed Adele.

"Well, if he wants it, he'll just have to work for it, won't he?"

Randolph emerged with his movie camera.

"Oh, *Pam*!" he cried. "I *love* you."

The Restoration

Chapter 2

With the second instalment of a research grant, the last prize of a three year stint in Toronto, Gilbert Rollins had intended to find himself an apartment after the Christmas holidays. Now with leisure enough to pursue his work, an architectural history of the city of Montreal, he and an old friend, Jacynthe Danielle, had gone tramping through the student ghetto in a tapering January storm to find him a place. The snowbanks, the mildness of the late afternoon darkness with its large, soft flakes angling down into the streetlights made an idle promise of warm scholarly evenings — coffee and sweaters — though the reality was salt-encrusted vestibules, silverfish, and villainous old landladies.

Jacynthe, petite, reserved Jacynthe, with her straight nose and fine brown eyes, Jacynthe of the flowers, whom he had known since his student days six years earlier, she could rest easy. She had her love life taken care of — always had, it seemed. She had her *vieux Montréal* restoration job complete with pine floors, a scattering of antiques, and the required tall dried flowers in rough pots. She had her lectureship at the *Université du Québec* which paid well enough and where

the hours meant time for browsing around, arranging, time enough to play occasional sister to his homeless, roofless self. He wondered if he had imposed on her, if she were judging him, and it was only once they'd signed a lease on a place with a huge carved oak fireplace and settled into a tiny restaurant on the corner of Pine and Park Avenue that Gilbert managed to relax a bit.

"Don't you feel a bit odd, you, when everybody else is abandoning ship?" Jacynthe teased him as she took a sip of her coffee.

"Odd? No, not really. I suppose I was bored. A cousin of mine in Vancouver told me when he got out of Quebec it was like a weight came off his shoulders. He felt comfortable for the first time in his life. I guess I don't want to be comfortable."

"So you are on safari, then, Gilbert."

"Oh, for god's sake."

Jacynthe smiled a little and took to playing with her coffee spoon.

"You know, I think everyone wants to be a little comfortable most of the time, don't you?"

"I'm not sure about that."

"Hatred of comfort -- it's such a pose, Gilbert. People like us have always been on the outside looking in, and now we can't get used to our privileges so we make them into matters of principle, something to fight about so we can perpetuate the attitudes of our youth."

"Which?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's hard to put your finger on them. You understand. The people I'm talking about used to hate society, or they wanted to die. Now they have expensive cars and big mortgages, but they

talk as though they're being flayed alive."

"Oh, come on now, Jacynthe."

"Well..." She smiled sceptically at him. "I think it's true." She paused. "It *is* true. *La contestation, la révolution permanente, épater les bourgeois* — I'm so sick of it."

"Could it be that you've turned into a *bourgeoise* yourself?"

"Probably. I'm sure that's what they would say."

"Tell me about Matthew," said Gilbert.

"Matthew?"

"Yes."

"Where can I begin about Matthew. You know he's thinking about going back to England in June?"

"Oh?"

"Yes. I'm too exciting to give up, it seems, but he feels guilty about me just the same. It's the old story. Sin and repent. His spiritual adviser must be losing patience with him."

"You've been quarrelling?"

"Quarrelling? I've told him to become Greek Orthodox, anything. You know, I had an insight into Matthew the other day, and it comes from his being an English Catholic, if you can believe it. I don't mean what it is here in Quebec where every immigrant used to become an 'English Catholic' whether he was Portuguese or whatever. I mean the real, historical *English Catholic* with all that that implies about plots, secret practising of the faith, clandestine missives to Rome. Only Matthew is using this *against* his church. *I'm* his private mass, if you can believe it." Jacynthe burst into laughter. "God knows I'm hardly

worth it, Gilbert, and besides with this new job of his I see him maybe two weekends a month, so he has plenty of time for abstinence. At least I *hope*..."

She laughed again.

"What I'm saying is that he's quite capable of holding on to me like a theory. Really, I'm being quite frank with you. At the same time, you know how he respects the church. He couldn't contemplate leaving it. So in the end he has his dilemma and he can crucify himself over it for the rest of his life -- it's beginning to feel that way. I threatened to go to England with him to meet his spiritual adviser. It would be like meeting his wife, I'm sure. We could trade stories."

A wan smile passed across her face. Then she sat back and looked at him fondly.

"Here you know all my intimate secrets and you sit there like a Buddha. I know you've been doing terrible things in that *queen city* of yours."

"Not mine! Not mine! I told you I only like edgy places. But no, Jacynthe, I've passed the most incredibly foolish, wasteful two years, ratting away in libraries, developing a nervous stomach, delivering boxes of Christmas cards to people because those walking termites at the university came through with their predictable pittance. It's been awful."

"And that's all you have to say for yourself?"

"That's all."

"Well." Jacynthe shrugged and brushed some hair away from her eyes. "But then there's Matthew's party work I forgot to mention."

"Yes, I see he's been doing rather well."

"Oh, yes he has! It's his lifeblood, and you can't imagine how traitorous I feel. He's in the party almost as soon as he's off the airplane, before his legal status is even clear, and I'm still carping from the sidelines."

"Carping? What for?"

"Because I'm not a good mixer. I don't know, Gil. I don't share Matthew's views. Perhaps I've spent too much time in the United States. His friends have made the suggestion. But I've tried to go along with their fervour and I always feel a bit silly at the end. When I was young I wanted a project to unify everybody, too, you know, to smile at people and have them smile back at me with a kind of mutual secret. That was delightful. We agreed. We shared certain assumptions. We liked to drink in the same places. Then I discovered that some of these people I wanted to smile at believed in vegetarianism, say, and would cordially dislike me if I ate a sausage; and some believed in wife-swapping, and others in anarcho-syndicalism or some such nonsense. My precious mystical unity evaporated. Frequently I found myself hating far many more people than I liked.

"And Matthew?"

"And Matthew." She smiled ruefully. "His politics are an extension of his religion, I suppose, and since my scepticism extends to both I can't be much support to him. I play conscientious objector on both counts. The luxury of non-commitment, you might say. Of course the hesitators are shunted aside — though Matthew's so delicate with me he would never put it quite so bluntly. He talks about the problem in

terms of 'active faith.' Presumably I have 'passive faith' — at least something to work on. When he finds out how superior I feel having none, I don't know what will happen."

"Oh, really now, Jacynthe."

"You don't believe me?"

"No."

"Well, it's true. I arrange my apartment. I read some books for my courses (precious few I'm sorry to say). I make the syntheses that people who are *parti pris* cannot. I can say what I like and keep people who revile me to a modest minimum. It's not a small accomplishment. And when Matthew takes me to those obligatory political *soirées* of his I can sit quietly in the background and listen to all those passionate people boiling away their evenings. It's mildly instructive."

"Tell me about that. I'm interested."

"Tell you about that? Really? What is there to tell? First there is the inevitable politico-bore who can fill you with every paragraph of the latest bill reorganizing *les Societés des fiducies du Québec*. If you can derail his little train, you can spend time with the Anglo who wants to show you his good will. He is from Saskatchewan but is in favour of sovereignty for Quebec. He says a few words in French. He loves the little boys who deliver beer on bicycles, adores Quebec cider, and forgets to tell you it gives him a headache. He also tells you the French have been discriminated against and is willing to suffer any indignity to redress the balance. If you have any stamina left, you can deal with the inevitable collection of dragons. The male type have large mustaches, open shirts, and steely eyes. In public institutions

they stick the soles of their feet up against the walls — to show they don't feel intimidated. They feel you out for how you live your life. Do you drive a car that's too big? Do you send your clothes to the dry-cleaners? They carry catalogues of boycotted products in their briefcases and have lots of indignation. Oh, Gilbert, I'm so sick of politics. I won't bore you with the female type — long pioneer dresses with salt rotting the hem. They are such tough nuts. They have the same scorecard as the men. It's enough to turn me into an ascetic."

"But it's fascinating, Jacynthe! I'm sure I would trade places with you any time. At least it sounds alive!"

"Really? Well, if it interests you so much I'll invite you to a real séance. If this doesn't set your teeth grinding, I'll start to doubt your good judgement."

"Oh?"

"My sister. And some of Matthew's friends. Do come. I'll need someone to wink at when things become *insupportable*."

When he left Jacynthe he walked slowly through the streets of the university district, Milton, Prince Arthur, Durocher, the places he'd come back to and which despite the mess of highrises still had a magic quality under the snowflakes. What was left were the gables, the ornate brackets like large wooden wheels that shouldered delicate iron-latticed balconies over the front doors. Six years — three in Ottawa, three in Toronto — and now he was pushing thirty, $380 in the bank and waiting on the Canada Council for the next instalment, back where he'd spent his earlier years buying cornbread and beer at Armand Desnoyer's

and repudiating the theories of Bahaus and Mies van der Rohe. Not much to show. That was his parents' silent reproof. At least doggy-eyed Randy was dragging home his little pound of flesh, enough to put a down payment on a house in Dollard des Ormeaux. But Gilbert? To the ladies at the bridge club, Gilbert was doing 'doctoral studies.' To the church choir, he was engaged 'in a thesis on architectural history.' To Norm Rollins, Adele confided her suspicions that her son was wasting his time.

Matthew was another benchmark. Three years ago when Jacynthe had first introduced him, he was the haggard keeper of a way-station for recent immigrants to the province — Matthew Oates, Franciscan, former legate in the Vatican foreign office, 'crucified,' as Jacynthe would put it, by his labours for the mission in Longueuil, too involved to shave or even to wash his hair. Now, dressed in French suits befitting the special assistant to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, he was wafted about the capital in government limousines like a Pasha on a Turkish rug. He'd gotten his picture in the French newsmagazines on the inside pages reserved for 'comers' — 32 and a comer, while Gilbert was preoccupied with cupolas and finials and the architectural significance of the old Villeray quarry.

Sometimes, on his silent walks, Gilbert could forget the fact that the world had become largely a dogfight for him, an eternal round of accomplishment or oblivion, and he could concentrate on those moments of harmony, sweeter than most, when his spirit and the sense of place were one. More often, though, (and certainly more often lately), he would be reminded that that was the kind of thing Matthew used to

reproach him for — that he was a recluse and an aesthete, that he had no sense of suffering in the world. They had had long discussions about this, painful ones at times, during which Gilbert would strike back at him with Chinese proverbs. "When you are hungry and you must choose between buying a flower and buying a loaf of bread, buy the flower." Matthew would smile wryly and tell him that the Christian version didn't speak of starving; it spoke of not living by bread alone, and he would illustrate the point with one of the third-world stories he'd become so well acquainted with. Gilbert would be shamed into submission.

Yet, for all Matthew's emphasis on sacrifice, Gilbert couldn't help noticing how much his new political life agreed with him. He was like someone in full bloom, whose leaves had finally reached unobstructed sunlight. His face shone; his hair was clean; his voice no longer trailed off into mumbling and uncertainty. He had the answers and he had them cold. He was, to put it bluntly, 'impressive' — and Gilbert couldn't help but wonder on the one hand at the transformation and be pained by it on the other. If that's what involvement meant, then maybe Matthew was right. Success was like fertilizer. It made the ego healthy. Conversely, to be stuck in a graduate student hole with no visible effect, with half a dissertation still to produce — a collection of file cards, a pile of photos and sketches to show for three years' work — that was like being a plant on the dark side of the house, blighted, reduced, checked, the will to grow endlessly, repeatedly thwarted. It had reached the point where he could scarcely bear to open the pages of the trade journals, *The Architectural Review*, *Building in Canada*, without stumbling over the name of one or another of his former

classmates — co-designers of shopping centres, office complexes, on some poignant occasions winners of junior awards, government contracts, their fine toothy faces staring out at him, half unrecognizable from the passage of time and the change of clothes. Then smitten with a pang of bitterness and envy, Gilbert would go out for a walk with his camera, examine some old buildings in some historic setting, contemplate the relationship between structure and site, the materials, the craftsmanship, and then slowly, imperfectly, these finished products of peoples' soiled ambitions would have their settling effect and he found he could return to his work.

The Restoration

Chapter 3

Having signed the lease on his apartment, Gilbert intended staying only a few more days with his parents. He reached home late that night and slept fitfully, fitfully enough that when Adele entered his room sometime before six o'clock that morning, he was more than half awake.

"I don't want you to be surprised at Father's face," she said with a quiet urgency. "Some of the workers decided to take a poke at him."

Gilbert half sat up.

"What's that?" he said.

"Oh, yes. I told him he was a fool to go in, but you know him. *Anything* for that place. I just don't want you to be surprised by his black eye, that's all." Then she lowered her voice even further. "Maybe you should think about going in with him this morning."

Adele loved drama; that was certain, but Norm's eye lived up to the advanced billing -- meaty black, hockey-puck black. His face was lacerated. There was a patch of blood in his extraordinarily neat hair.

"What the hell happened to you?"

Norm avoided his son's glance and dug his spoon deeper into his porridge bowl.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Norm, answer him."

Silently Norm took a mouthful of porridge. For another moment he kept his eyes averted; then, finally, he said, "It's what I've been telling you."

"What?"

"What I've been telling you! It's like I've been saying and saying: give the bastards an inch and they'll take a mile. But, oh, nah, nah. They're good people. They've been mistreated. They're oppressed. Oppressed!" Norm took another mouthful of porridge. "I know the guy that did this, you know, kept my eye on the bugger from way back. Big three hundred pound lunkhead, beer-bellied — lord, the gut on that guy'd make you sick just to look at it — comes in with a sign saying 'Starvation wages.' 'Starvation wages, if you please! The cheek of the fellow. Brass cheek. And the whole cotton-pickin' crew of 'em just the same — and this is the thing I've been trying to tell you." He wagged his finger portentously at his son. "Destructive. Destructive bastards. Worse than animals."

"Oh, Norm. They have the right to organize, you know."

"Organize!"

The angry purple vein in Norm's forehead was working furiously. His face looked as though it were about to pop like an over-ripe squash.

"They'll organize all right, kid. They'll organize so as they'll come into your own home and take everything you've got. You might as well open the front door and let 'em load up. That's organize. Nah, nah! Keep what you build; that's what I say. Keep what you build. Fight the bastards. Tooth and nail. Don't let 'em have an inch."

"So that's what you did?" said Adele. "You fought them?"

"Kid, kid, I try to tell you, but you won't listen. When the owner tells you the door is closed to you, what do you do? Kick it in? They knew we were locking up. 10:45 sharp. On the button! But Chalifoux, he's a big boy. Chalifoux's not going to take no for an answer. *'J'ai besoin de mon écharpe*,' he says. Well, like Christ, *j'ai besoin de mon écharpe*. Sure I stopped him. He tried to muscle that big beer-belly of his through the door. After he whacked me with his bloody picket, McFarlane and Winters had to wrestle him out. Damn good thing they did, too, or the whole kit 'n kaboodle'd have gone on one all holy rampage. They can't keep their hands off. Gotta break everything up. Just like that crew of theirs they got in Quebec City."

Norm downed the rest of his porridge and went off through the hall to the bathroom. For a moment, Gilbert sat rooted in his seat; then, when his mother looked at him meaningfully, he rose and walked slowly down the hall after his father.

"Listen, I want to go in with you and have a look at those building records."

Norm swished his razor back and forth in the hot water and returned to a particularly delicate angle near the chin.

"Did you hear me?"

There was a pause. Norm looked back at his chin then finally over to his son.

"It's not the time, boy," he said.

"What do you mean it's not the time.?"

"It's not the time."

"Oh, Norm, let him go," Adele said from behind her son. "There's nobody there. What harm can it do? Besides, he needs the work for his thesis. Oh, don't listen to him. Go get your coat, Gilbert."

All the way into town on the train, Norm barely exchanged a word with his son. Not that that was unusual; there was hardly a subject on which they didn't disagree. Norm was a great believer in free enterprise, for example, an *adept*. He bored his wife to tears reading her sections of the business pages aloud. To him they were like chapters of holy writ. He particularly liked stories that had billions of dollars in them. "Belgian Consortium Mounts 3 Billion Dollar Take-over Bid." Norm would wrap his lips around the b's as though he were spending the money with the sound. Adele would escape to her Rachmaninoff records.

But no johnny-come-lately with a convert's zeal was he. Stalwart, four-square, like a bull-terrier with a brief case, Norm Rollins hadn't changed his opinions in forty years, a fact about which he was immensely proud and which he used against his wife whenever the opportunity arose. "I've been telling you and telling you." With Norm, the telling had spanned the decades — R.B. Bennett, King, St. Laurent, Diefenbaker. Only the message had never changed. Profit, supply and demand, charging what the market would bear, not killing the goose that layed the golden egg — Gilbert had had it all flourished at him like the trumpet fanfare for an African king, and his answer was (by now) a bemused silence, since Gilbert also knew that his father had never invested a penny in his life. It was too risky.

And in that way Norm Rollins was a faithful reflection of his firm — Mercer and Granville, Printing and Wholesale Stationery, est. 1848 — a

family-owned concern run by third cousins and grand-nephews of the old dowager lady herself, Louis Granville's spinster daughter and only heir, 94 years of age, owner of 83% of the outstanding shares, Martha Mercer Granville. The money went to finance her mansion on Redfern plus her army of retainers and private nurses; maybe 10% a year of profits was returned to the company (if that), to the extent that Mercer and Granville began to dwindle. Outworn equipment contributed; so did the flight of Anglophone businesses from the province, that coupled with what had been an almost congenital reluctance to move into the French market, at least until George Donoghue had taken over as V.P. The Olympic Games had changed things in some way, too. Gilbert had had more than a few hints from his father to that effect: the mayor was a 'great man,' had 'put Montreal on the map' *et cetera*, though Gilbert would have been surprised if outwardly, at least, anything had registered at all. He could remember the dreary offices off la rue des Récollets, the worn lighting, the ancient adding machines and sour young *Québecoise* secretaries who swore as they broke their fingernails on typewriter keys that were old and too stiff. The stubborn management: granite Scot. The old ways were the best ways, and so for years past the company had frittered away its opportunities and blamed the mess on the workers. "Fat pay for an easy day." "You can't get any decent help any more." It had been left to Norm Rollins to tighten down the screws.

A congenial job to be sure. For a decade now, Norm Rollins had striven to put himself on board with his American heroes. As Spiro Agnew fought the press, Norm Rollins had battled waste. As Richard Nixon bombed Hanoi, Norm Rollins had pressed the button on coffee breaks.

And as his president rose up on his hind legs to fend off the Watergate hounds, Norm Rollins' loyalty had grown almost lithic, monumental. "How do you *know* he did it?" he had once asked, outraged. "How can you be so cotton-pickin' sure *you* know?" It was the same whenever his religious beliefs were questioned. "Can you prove it didn't happen?" he would say à propos the resurrection. With Adele it worked every time. She was flummoxed, and Norm was content to believe the whole world would be too if it ever bothered to seek him out.

As the train pulled in, Norm buried his paper and reached for his fedora. "Got to get a-going," he said. "Never know what monkey business those bastards have been up to." Then he led the pace on a brisk walk down University to St. James and on south to la rue des Récollets. Old Montreal: Scots fur baron territory; now, as the developers would have it, an archaic museum to the French fact. In the brown slush of Notre Dame, Gilbert thought of the spice warehouses near his father's office and how during the summer when he'd worked there once the smell of bulk cloves and cinnamon had found their way through the open windows.

"Holy Christ, will you look at the hyenas!"

Down near the Granville building, a crowd of picketers had gathered. There were a few policemen parked up on the curb. From the corner Norm and his son could see the distinctive knotted insignia of the *Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux* on the placards, then, a moment later, the blue paint that had been spattered across the English signs on the office windows. The policemen were trying to be tolerant and good-natured as they pushed the picketers back from the front steps of the building, but the men were angry and some shoving matches broke out.

"*Aye, Ti-Guy, laisse faire, là!*"

"*Une claque s'a yeule. C'est ça que ça lui prend.*"

Norm hesitated at the corner.

"I certainly hope you're not thinking of going through the front door," said Gilbert.

"Damned well should," his father replied.

But Norm liked to be brave mostly from behind windows, the family car having been a particularly favourite theatre. There he could joust with taxis that had cut him off. "Ya like that? Ya like that, you clown?" — this at city intersections; or once, at 70 miles an hour on the Laurentian Autoroute, he'd ordered Adele to lower her window while he screamed and drove, his head stuck out over her lap while the purple vein in his forehead twitched like a small snake. "Ya like that? Ya like that medicine?"

"That's the thing that gets me," he declared as they walked toward a small lane. "Why in the name of good *Christ* you have to call in that bunch of no good layabouts to deal with them, that's what I want to know. Time was the billy-clubs would have been out. Knock a few heads together. Now they're all in the trough."

"What trough?"

"The unions, boy! What do you think? They're not all in cahoots? They're *all* union stooges."

"Oh, for god's sake."

"You mark my words, boy. Mark my words."

After Norm got them in through the shipping entrance, he went straight through to the front display windows to inspect the damage.

Art Mayberry, the assistant manager, had gotten there before them, and as the three of them peered out, they could hear the jibes and catcalls begin almost instantly.

"Aye, Claude, ce maudit Rollins i' est là."

"Istie."

"Rollins! *La porte est s'posée d'êt' barrée. T'as oublié? Seigneur!"*

"Nettoie donc ta photo de la reine, niaiseux."

"Aye, garde-moi donc l'espèce qu'il a amené avec lui. Ta-barouette. Aye! Y a pas de travail au bureau, maudit! Allez donc toutes chier! Allez donc chier!"

An apple bounced and split off the stonework beside the window where Gilbert's father stood. He could see one thin worker in a lumber jacket jeering at them furiously from the sidewalk.

"On va ouère, mes gros boss. Bande de niaiseux! Vous l'aurez, vot' leçon! Le Québec aux Québécois!"

The first thing Norm did that morning was to phone a security service.

The Restoration

Chapter 4

Arthur Bingham Mayberry, hard of hearing, 67, was two years past retirement but had been kept on at his old post of assistant office manager because the job meant so much to him. That morning he'd arrived even before the pickets, for the same reason Norm had come — to keep an eye on the place while the real bosses, Parkins, George Donoghue, Al Mercer and his boy were at the Mercers' ski chalet in Vermont, waiting things out. Around nine that morning, the picketers had calmed down sufficiently in Norm's estimation for Mayberry to take Gilbert into his office.

"So," Mayberry said, sitting down and motioning Norm to do the same. "You'd be interested in looking at the files."

Gilbert nodded.

"You dad here mentioned a while ago you might be wanting to look at the records, so I got them out — before all this trouble." He waved his hand in the general vicinity of the street. "Damn them anyhow. Who would have believed — "

"Long as you keep them out in the cold, Art," said Norm. "Where they belong."

"Shall I take him down to the safe then?"

"Oh I don't suppose he'll do any harm, do you?"

So Mayberry led Gilbert down the hall to the right, swung open an old roller-caster safe, and fetched a black portfolio from inside.

"Is there any special thing you'd be looking for?"

"Oh, not really," said Gilbert. "I just wanted to browse through the building records."

"Mm." Mayberry brushed some dust from his white shirt. ""Can't imagine what you'd find in there. Long as I can remember this place was a warehouse and an office building. A handsome one, I'll grant you that. But Norm tells me you do some sort of historical research?"

"Yes. Yes I do."

"Mm." Mayberry flicked at his shirt again. "You know, you take those gryphons out there on the side of the windows. Ever notice them? That must have taken a devil of a heap of work, wouldn't you say? You can't get work like that done any more."

"No, I suppose not."

"Nossir. The work *cannot* be done. That's all there is to it. *Craftsmanship*. A dead art these days. Did you know that this building — I mean the front of it, now — this here was a replica of one made by the I-talians in Florence?"

"Yes, I heard that."

"Oh, you knew that, did you? Norm'd probably have told you. Well, I been around here 43 years and I can tell you something about this place. One thing they did was build for keeps in them days. Oh, you betcha. Rafters, beams. You seen the size of them in the basement now? Four

foot thick if they're an inch. I'm not kidding you. Four foot. Douglas fir. And you take that stonework in the foundation. I wouldn't begin to tell you how thick *that* is. Nigh on a castle's worth if it's nothing. I can take you down there and — But you probably want to look at those papers. That's okay. But you know, you don't get the real idea of the place in those papers. Best place to look is just past the old diesel generating room where they keep the big rolls. That's the real place. Big hole in the foundation down there."

Gilbert's ears pricked up.

"Oh?" he said.

"Sure! I'll take you down there later on. Anyway, you call me when you're through, and I'll take care of the safe."

The papers were building records, old title deeds, records of transactions between the company and the Granvilles, later the Mercers, dated at various points in the nineteenth century from the inception of the company on. It took him an hour or two to work back through the top quarter alone. Of course, Gilbert wasn't terribly interested in Mayberry's gryphons, or in any of the other reproductions that took a sizeable space in the catalogue of the city's earlier architecture. What he *was* looking for had grown out of his one published monograph to date — a critical inventory of the buildings from the French régime in the city, of which there were only about a dozen examples left standing. From his own rough guesses about the outside structure of the building, Gilbert suspected that in the hodge-podge of brick and stonework at the rear, the Mercer-Granville building concealed the walls of Père Joseph

Danis' *Couvent des Récollets*, first built in 1702, supposedly demolished in 1867, having been loaned to the Anglicans twelve years before the *patriote* Rebellion. So Gilbert felt his critical inventory could perhaps claim an important addition. What he would have liked was the one elusive document, perhaps a requisition for building supplies, which often stood for a title deed in those days, at best one signed by Pierre Janson himself, the Paris stonemason who had built the walls in 1712.

As he went through the papers, Gilbert's thoughts would wander back to the chapters of his architectural history, stuffed haphazardly into his brief-case at his parents' place, and, as so often happened lately, it seemed, he began to feel slightly claustrophobic. He would begin to doubt himself and the distances he had taken from life, real life, vibrant life, as real people lived it. He laid the Mercer-Granville file aside for a moment, and let the orotund prose of his thesis appear in his mind, rhetorical, slightly pompous & flat, his invocations of Lewis Mumford, so frequent, surely too frequent, like an incantation, the tiresome allusions to harmony and 'human scale.' How weary he could become of it all suddenly!

He sat back from the papers in front of him, consciously down on himself and took out a notebook and the general introduction he'd been working on sporadically over the past months. Snatches and phrases would present themselves to him as he read, and as they did he would smile to himself, almost in derision, imagining a hostile audience, the most critical possible reception.

> ... I contend that building is an aspect of culture almost in the bacteriological sense, the ideal grouping showing the same order of individual difference and 'generic' similarity as a culture on a microscopic slide or a collection of garden flowers. Therefore harmonic relations between buildings mean as much as the individual work, since they are the visible expression of organic identity and so 'know' each other as cells recognize one another and repel what is not themselves. At their best, then, buildings reveal the same crux of order that lies behind, say, a crystal's fracture point — the key to duplication, like a living cell, what makes it distinct, recognizable.

How utterly pompous and irrelevant, he would think to himself, and he would ask himself how anyone could possibly take what he had written seriously. Then idly, destructively, he read a little more in the same vein:

> Consequently I am suggesting a complete re-evaluation of monumentalism in modern architecture, particularly of its errors of egocentricity, its refusal to consider the givens of a particular site, its disdain of local materials and traditions. The North American nineteenth century — a maligned time — ought to be aesthetically rehabilitated — Boston's Beacon Hill, certain grey-stone towns in central and eastern Ontario, the rural simplicity of Prince Edward Island, places where the unity and harmony of materials and shapes express the predominately civic and communal spirit both of the buildings and of the people who made them.

Naive! Completely naive! Somewhere he knew he believed these ideas; they had come to him with intensity, had evolved themselves over the years with a certain conviction. In healthier moods he'd persuaded himself they meant something and would have an effect, and mentally he had re-arranged whole areas according to his taste, shaping a re-

ordering with parks, water, buildings. More often, however, and certainly more often lately, a certain torpor beset him, as though he knew in his heart that the currents of things would move forward or back despite his approval or disapproval, that essentially his kind of work was of, no account. Then he asked himself why people had bothered to build at all when the products of their labour were just as likely to be torn down, desecrated, if not immediately then certainly in a generation or two. He would think of the gardens and squares, the carefully tended houses that had been ripped up and built over since the last century alone, and he would decide that Matthew was probably right. Better to worry about feeding people who were hungry than these futile aesthetic concerns.

Once during their discussions Gilbert remembered having quoted Turgenev in his own defence: "Each time you begin something new, ask yourself whether you are serving civilization — in the true and strict sense of the word — whether you are realizing one of its principles." It was a quote he'd jotted at the head of one of his chapters, and however pretentious it had seemed to Matthew that day, the thought returned to him as he went back to leafing through the faded building records on the office desk. Perhaps in some modest way, what he was doing *did* contribute. It recaptured a lapsed strain, like a biological vestige. He tried to settle himself with this thought. He tried to renew his concentration.

Then, towards the middle of the sheaf of documents, the title deeds and records of transactions, Gilbert found — not what he was looking for — the requisition from the 18th century that might have helped nail

down his case — but a series of letters, curiously out of place, perhaps misfiled because their dates were comparatively recent, some from the early 1960's, others from 1971-75, all related to negotiations over the status of the building and, from the signatures, involving three main parties — Lucien Bolduc for the executive committee of the City of Montreal, Guy Navrette, Minister of Cultural Affairs during the previous provincial government, and George Donoghue and Al Mercer for Mercer-Granville. On some, small passages had been underlined; others were noted with asterisks, though the copies of Donoghue's and Mercer's letters stood clear and unmarked.

For about an hour, Gilbert studied the file, trying to piece together what was at issue, especially the puzzling letters with the insignia of the City of Montreal on the letterhead and signed by Lucien Bolduc. Gilbert gathered well enough that as early as 1960 the Viger Commission had wanted the Mercer building included in the original boundaries of the historical district of the city and that the company had objected on the grounds that designation might cripple its plans for expansion. The matter had apparently been allowed to drop only to resurface again in late 1971 with the intervention of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, calling once more for the building's classification as part of the general area set aside by the commission eleven years earlier. There followed over an eighteen-month period some testy bureaucratic exchanges between the company and the ministry, references to possible injunctions, threats of legal action, a squall of officialese and cold temper tantrums, mysteriously quelled once Bolduc's letters began to appear — vaguely worded letters with reference to *"l'accord que*

nous venons d'atteindre" or *"le compromis honorable abordé tout recémment"* and distinctly warmer to the cause of Mercer-Granville than those signed by the minister, Guy Navrette, or his special assistant.

The last entry, dated 1975 and signed by Bolduc, thanked the company for its co-operation, *"une co-operation plus que généreuse"* as the phrase went, and assured its directors of the minimum of interference in its plans for expansion which, when and if completed, "could only accrue to the economic health of the city." Some deal had been struck, obviously, though Gilbert had no idea what, and much as he read and reread the correspondence to see if there were clues he'd overlooked, nothing suggested itself. He got himself a coffee from the machines before he walked over to where Mayberry and his father were holed up in their offices and asked Mayberry to find him a tape measure and show him where the hole in the foundation was.

When he came back up from the basement, he sank into a leather easy chair in his father's office.

"So, boy, the spiders get you?"

"What?"

Norm looked at his son's pant legs.

"Oh. Well, I don't know about that," Gilbert replied, brushing off some cobwebs, "but I think you might have something down there."

"I sure as hell know what we've got down there," his father said. "Four hundred thousand worth of merchandise those bastards won't let us move out."

"Well, you might have more than that."

"Oh? What's that?"

"Probably the whole of the *Couvent des Récollets*, foundations, walls, very likely fully intact, though the warehouse is built around them."

Mayberry looked up at him.

"What's that you say?"

"The *Couvent des Récollets*," Gilbert repeated. "Built in 1703. There are only twelve other buildings from the French régime left in the city."

"Where's this?"

"Down in the basement."

"In the basement!" Mayberry laughed. "What's it doing down there?"

Gilbert smiled back at him.

"Is that worth something then?"

"I don't know," said Gilbert. "But it probably means the whole place ought to be classified."

"Classified?"

"Registered. As a cultural property."

"Ah?" Mayberry looked up at him again. "A cultural property?"

His father twiddled his pen, then looked out the window for a moment.

"What would that mean, now, a cultural property?" Mayberry continued.

"Well, you couldn't tear the place down, for starters," said Gilbert. "It would have an effect on the surrounding properties, too, I should think."

"Mm. A cultural property. That's a new one on me. What are your thoughts on that, Norm?"

But Norm had started shaking his head.

"Nope," he said, and then he looked out the window again.

"What do you mean 'Nope'?" said Gilbert.

"Just that, boy. No goddamn government going to declare this place a cultural property."

"Why not?"

Norm stopped cold. He was going to lay this one to rest early.

"No cotton-pickin' bunch of Frenchmen -- or those bastards in Ottawa for that matter -- are going to come in here with their assinine papers and their commissions and their so-called 'experts' and foul up the works, boy, and that's it! Get so as you can't turn around without 'experts' looking over your shoulder and telling you what you can put where and whether the plumbing is just so and can that cotton-pickin' toilet go in the corner, no it goes in the basement -- oh, my *god*, fella, you want to make an honest dollar and who's there with their beastly long snouts nosing at it? Greedy envious government pikers, that's who. Holy Christ, I can't think of anything worse."

"Now hold *on*," said Gilbert. "You can't just say no like that and do nothing about it."

"Why the hell not? Why in the name of Christ not, fella? It's easy to say no. N-O. Hands off. You'd think we don't have enough out there with those animals parading around, and you want to let more of them in through the back door? Key-rist, boy, come to your senses!"

"Come to *my* senses!"

"Come to your senses, I say. And soon, I tell you, or the whole place'll be down the drain so fast. Give 'em an inch and they'll take a mile. You never heard of that? Get their lousy foot in the door and

push push push. Like that bonehead Chalifoux? No thanks! And I hope it's not those papers out there put you onto this business because -- "

"Now listen. This is *already* supposed to be an historic site, or aren't you aware of the Viger Commission — "

His father looked at him with a gleam of triumph in his eyes.

"Don't they teach you much in that school of yours, fella? We went all through this fifteen years ago, little sneaks coming around from the 'Viger Commission.' They were the big boys. They had badges, big plans. Well, it didn't work I tell you. Take a look at the street signs around here. Same as every other kind in the city. No fancy red and gold 'Viger Commission' signs, and I thank the good lord for that or we'd have been in the poorhouse long before this. We threw the monkey wrench into their machine, let me tell *you*!"

"Oh? And I don't doubt how. Maybe a few political deals here and there and suddenly you were off the hook, eh?"

His father looked at him acidly. In the heat of the moment, Gilbert wondered if he hadn't put his foot in it. Deliberately, he softened his voice.

"Well, do you mind if I go back in the basement and do a little looking around?"

"Nope. You can look around all you like, but those papers now are something else. They go back in the safe."

"I take it you're not going to let me photocopy some of them before you do that?"

His father stopped for a minute and put his pen down on the desk blotter.

"Nope," he finally said. "That's too risky."

"For heaven's sake," said Gilbert quietly. "I hope you realize what you're doing."

But his father just kept shaking his head and refused to look at him.

Then Mayberry got up and walked to the other office.

The Restoration

Chapter 5

By 6:30 Gilbert had showered and changed and set out for an evening with his sister who'd arranged the visit some weeks earlier when he'd first got in from out of town. He drove through the salty muck on the Décarie expressway and turned west along highway 40, through the suburbs of the West Island — Pointe Claire, Dorval — Montreal's English preserve, where most everyone wished he could dig up his house and truck it wholesale to Calgary or Mississauga. This was the land of kids and fat mortgages, where people glued themselves to the radio hotlines to keep abreast of what was happening in the federal election or, more importantly, on the referendum front, all the time wondering if they could get out if the catastrophe struck.

It was like a war. Even Gilbert, fresh from Toronto, couldn't miss a newscast, and he found himself, almost compulsively, turning the car radio from one hotline to another, finally landing on Jules Proulx's *Dernière Parade* (CHOF), where as one of the ranking panelists (along with a labour leader and a rep from the Federal Liberals) sat none other than Matthew Oates, arguing in his Yorkshire accented French the logistics of dividing up Canadian crown assets. It was strange to hear

Matthew articulate in stacatto hotline style some of the convictions they'd discussed and debated themselves over a beer. For an instant Gilbert thought it conferred an odd kind of relevance to their talks, though it didn't take him long to remember that all *he* could do was listen and privately react — to know the rebuttals he longed to hear but to find to his dismay that no one picked up on them. He found himself switching off the radio with a violence that almost cracked the knob.

Life was short for paranoiacs. Now he would have to congratulate his sister on her new family and probably endure the kind of *doubles entendres* his mother had perfected over the years. "Do you ever hear from Jennifer Bradley any more?" — meaning, Why did you never marry Jennifer and raise a family yourself like everybody else? How did you tell her it was Jennifer who'd decided she preferred an abortion and a newspaper career in Europe to squiring him through a Ph.D? He had enough failure on his neck.

His sister sat in the front seat of her living room, her legs up on a hassock, her face with the bloated, fluid-retentive look of the middle stages of pregnancy. But where ordinarily she liked to collapse just before eight into a kind of comfortably gestative state, her brother could tell that something had seized her attention and brought her out of herself. After a few preliminary political remarks (almost convention by this time), Pamela changed the subject to what really interested her.

"So she's finally done it, eh?" she announced.

Gilbert looked at her expectantly.

"What?"

"Well, she's leaving father. Didn't she tell you?"

"Oh. Yes, as a matter of fact, she did mention something."

"She *did*?"

"Yes, but that's nothing new is it? I mean she's been threatening this for years."

"Oh, yes, but did you know the movers were coming Friday?"

"Oh?"

Minor triumph. Gilbert had *not* known the movers were coming Friday.

"That's why I say, she's finally done it!" Pam was beaming. "I think it's terrific," she said flatly.

Gilbert couldn't help raising his eyebrows.

"Oh? Why?"

"Because he's just so — so *old-fashioned*," she replied. "So uptight. 'Nah, nah, nah, you can't do this.' (She lowered her voice to do her imitation of him.) 'Nah, nah, nah, you can't do that.' He just makes me sick. Serves him right." Pamela paused for a moment. "You know what he did to Randy last week end? You know Randy is thinking of doing his Ph.D in parapsychology. Maybe not *right* away, but in a year or so." She leaned her head around the corner. "Was it the Killam grant you were applying for, Randy?" she yelled.

Randy padded softly up from downstairs.

"Oh," he said, doing a slight double-take. "Hello Gilbert."

"Was it the Killam Memorial you were thinking of applying for?" she repeated.

"Yes," said Randy. "It's the ten thousand dollars."

Pam fell silent to let the figure sink in. Then Randy turned to his brother-in-law.

"I'm wanting to look into the application of parapsychology as to certain counselling techniques," he said earnestly.

"Oh, I see."

There was a pause.

"Anyway," Pam continued, "We told Father that — I mean ten thousand dollars, that's quite something, *I* think. At least Mother was pleased. But you know what he said? 'Hocus pocus.' You know what he's like. 'Hocus pocus.' God, was I mad! And if anybody *needs* counselling. That man has so many problems. Eh, Randy? Don't you think? He's so bloody cognitive to begin with."

Gilbert smiled in recognition. Really he hadn't the faintest idea what it meant to be cognitive. Nor did he want to know.

"So you think she'll be better off?" he asked as blandly as possible.

"*I* do. I mean, can you imagine living thirty-five years with *him*? I'd go crazy."

Randy looked at her with a little disappointment.

"Oh, I know that's not the right word. Frustrated. I'd be frustrated. But can you imagine it? Thirty-five years. And you know he's impotent, eh?"

"What do you mean? He's fathered three children."

"Oh, Gilbert. That doesn't *mean* anything. Haven't you ever seen him in a bathing suit? His *white* legs. God, it's disgusting. So skinny and *old*. She's never liked small men anyway."

"What do you mean she doesn't like small men?"

"She doesn't! She told me. And she told her doctor, too. He's not big enough. Well, when you think of it, she's probably heavier than he is anyway!"

His sister laughed and clapped her hand over her mouth. How thrilling it was to be wicked! Pam always did think herself endlessly clever.

"But I'm sure she'll be better off. I know she will be. She won't be able to pull that childish act every time she has to do something. You know how she is with him. Oh, it's too sickening to imitate. 'No-orm, I can't pull the *button*.' And Randy and I won't have to listen to her sexual fantasies — at least I hope we won't. She can find herself some bigger man, *any* bigger man, if it comes to that. I say just what she says. She should have done this years ago."

"I agree with you to some extent, Pamela," said Randy, "but I still think there are some doubts as to the situational context she finds herself in."

"What."

Pamela never liked it when Randy contradicted her.

"No, I think so, Pamela. Mother relies far too much on her doctor's forward prescriptive advice. Instead of educing the correct response relative to *her* ethical choices, he imposes a paternal, authoritarian paradigm on the situation and thereby adds to the conflict potential."

"But not the kinetic potential."

"No, I wouldn't go that far. Not the kinetic potential."

"Mm." Pamela thought about this; then she said, "Well, you're probably right. But I still think she's always been half in love with him anyway. Do you realize," she added, turning to Gilbert, "that it will be seven and a half years now since she started going to Dr. Boll? And have you ever seen how she gets made up for him?"

Gilbert smiled wanly and shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

"Geez, if I were Father, I'd really have been suspicious. Every week like that? God! And he isn't even *trained*. All he's had is a few courses in family counselling. Randy knows because they were in some together. He's just a G.P., but I'll bet you if he'd had better training he'd never have let Mother get away with it."

"With what?"

"Her fixation! I just think that's *so* unprofessional, don't you think, Randy? And the *money* he's getting! One visit a week for seven and a half years? That adds up. Imagine, Randy, if you had even two more clients at his rates."

Gilbert recalled that Randy did a little counselling of his own on the side and that he liked to call the people who had been referred to him 'clients.' But Randy needed the M.D. to get full access to government rates and, short of that, he suffered: his practice lacked confidence; his bank book hadn't gained either, though for Gilbert these were two of the things that helped keep his brother-in-law bearable.

"I think what Gilbert finds difficulty with, Pam, is the extent to which Dr. Boll's ego-involvement is retarding Mother's own progress toward self-actualization. I know I have difficulty with that myself. The role-target of the counsellor should be participatory — "

"Not prescriptive."

Pam dearly loved to finish off Randy's thoughts for him like this. She paused for a moment. "It's true. She's just substituting one authority figure for another. It's really so obvious, isn't it? Wouldn't you agree, Gilbert?"

"Pardon me?"

He'd been nodding and smiling his way through up to this point, and now Pam wanted to draw him into one of her exhausting discussions. She knew his opinions about psychology. During their franker days he'd told her how much he hated his mother's bargain-basement angst. He'd made the usual arrogant pronouncements about self-indulgence and *le moi haissable*, the interminable monologue of Self. Now Pamela wanted to confront him about this, to show him how ignorant he'd been, how little different he was, really, from his pig-headed father, and to remind him that (even if it *had* been seven and a half years) his mother had at least had enough sense to ignore his advice. For his part, Gilbert resisted by turning the conversation studiously back to banalities. He never once rose to the bait, and after about an hour and a half, having done his duty, he saw his opening and made his excuses. He had congratulated them on their child-to-be. He had drunk tea with them and not quarrelled. He had not made any disparaging remarks, hadn't questioned the basis of their thinking, had numbed himself to provocation and, since he was in their house, stifled his opinions. They were family, after all, and there was no sense in protracted warfare. But it was typically a relief, in the cold night air, to regain his car and the privacy of his own thoughts. Jacynthe was right. People did not agree. And it took only an hour or two in someone else's company to realize to what extent.

The Restoration

Chapter 6

There were no elevators in the converted warehouse on St. Paul Street where Jacynthe Danielle had her apartment. Gilbert had to walk up five flights of stairs before he saw her face in the doorway, the carved pine table behind her covered with wine bottles and plates of hors d'oeuvres. It wasn't much different from how he'd imagined it when she'd first told him about her 'great passion' — interior design. There were the walls stripped to reveal the original stone, the specially commissioned fireplace, the hooked rugs, the lithographs. In the living room that overlooked the lighted tar roofs of other buildings, he could make out the harbour grain elevators, slated for demolition, the antennae of some berthed freighter. The overall effect was one of grace and care, conveyed by the vista of finely waxed floors that joined the combined dining room and living room — an effect of quiet sparsity and order and plenitude which, for Gilbert, recalled the line from Ruskin, the one about good taste being an essentially moral quality.

"Gil!" Matthew Oates rose from a large yellow Quebec rocker and extended his hand. "How nice to see you."

He had a Yorkshire breeding and soft manners, neither curt, nor

brusque, nor ironic, as Gilbert tended to be.

"Do you know everyone? Gil Rollins — Jean Louis Pigeon, his wife Mélanie, Suzanne Legendre, Jeff Hotham."

Gilbert sat on a small velvet covered seat, sipped at a glass of wine, and tried to catch the gist of the conversation.

Jeff Hotham, he learned, was a translator of Quebec fiction, a tall, sandy-bearded Alabaman, soft-spoken, dressed in a beige jacket, ascot tie, and yellow construction boots laced only part-way up. He'd fled from the draft in 1969 and in the intervening years had thrown himself into Quebec culture, consciously separating himself from his American past. He now spent most of his time in the St. Denis cafés where he rubbed shoulders with the writers he worshipped and learned to sprinkle his speech with French phrases and parlous anecdotes about the *Parti Québecois*. He knew the farmhouses of Paul Couture and Louis-Georges Carignan (El-Gé-Cé to the initiated), the dedication of whose book — to the terrorist, Paul Rose — Hotham took to be the most courageous literary act of the year. He had had coffee with Raymond Plourde in a donut place in Longueuil (after the crisis) where Plourde had told him about incest, sleep, and death, the holy trinity of modern Quebec literature. He had been in the deepest parts of El-Gé-Cé's summer kitchen and on the park bench near de Maisonneuve where Melançon had for the first time shown Carignan the manuscript of *Les Astres Souterrains*. So he made a specialty of himself, mostly in English audiences, because he had taken the trouble to penetrate and because he had shown an interest, although the residue of condescension involved did little to endear him to Pigeon who sat visibly bored in the opposite corner of the room.

"Mélanie, est-ce que tu peux m'aider?" Jacynthe called out from the kitchen.

Mélanie's face twitched momentarily with a look of irritation that took Gilbert aback. The conversation had turned to the separation of Quebec from the rest of Canada (Hotham was all for it), and something in her face told him she had her own word to say on the subject and would brook no sacrifices.

"Un instant, Jacynthe."

But it was Pigeon who jumped in first.

"So I take it you think we should do this to get rid of the Americans?"

"Oh, hell," replied Hotham. "I can think of any number of reasons why we should do it. It's reasons why we shouldn't that escape me."

Gilbert found Hotham's 'we' strangely offensive.

"Oh, I agree with that," said Pigeon. "But that's not the problem."

Mélanie's husband sat back belligerently in his chair. With his hair cut close, his brown velvet suit, and his curiously bulbous head, he looked like a dog with its tail cropped, spoiling for a fight. Gilbert noticed the twin emblems in his lapel -- one the stars and stripes, the other a fleur de lys.

"I've got no quarrel with the Americans," he said. "Nor should they with us. It's the bloody British who are causing all the problems."

"The British?" said Suzanne Legendre, puzzled.

"That's right!" piped in Mélanie from the sidelines.

It was only then Gilbert realized that this was Jacynthe's sister -- the same slight build, aquiline nose, and straight dark hair, only

Mélanie's eyes were greenish, not brown, her expression sharper, more concise.

"The Abercrombies," Pigeon continued. "Lord Sutton. The Earl of Chittenham, the Arbuthnots — the major elements of the British aristocracy. We've uncovered links between them and the Burmese drug traffic — it used to be Malaysian — all through their despicable organizations —"

"— the Brotherhood of Malta, for one!" said Mélanie.

Hotham looked politely amused.

"Anti-colonialism is one thing, but folks, my word..."

"So Giscard never accepted diamonds from Bokassa, I suppose?"

"Well, perhaps he did. I'm not saying — "

"The evidence is there, all documented. Look at the collusion of the Rothschilds. The number one enemy of the third world is monarchist imperialism. Read the African press! All that goes double for Quebec. Who do you think controls one third of Montreal? It's not the papacy."

"But you're not saying — "

"You won't believe it, but you *should* believe it. One third of Montreal is controlled directly by British aristocratic interests, anti-Republican interests, as it has been from the days of the fur trade. Right now these same interests are trying to wreck the Common Market. They're turning Northern Ireland into a powderkeg. Their drug axis has destroyed Lebanon — really, check the facts, and they're actively conspiring to frustrate the will of Quebecers at this very moment."

"Lord Thompson!" cried Mélanie, egging him on.

Pigeon nodded his head vigorously. "The North American propaganda

press. There is no intelligentsia here because it is a cultural impossibility."

"I see we are all to be called stupid tonight," said Suzanne from her corner.

"Not stupid."

"No, not stupid," repeated Mélanie, injured by the implication. "Misled. Brainwashed. It happens to intelligent people, too, you know."

Pigeon had drunk a lot of wine and was feeling generally rude. He had sunk a little petulantly into his seat.

"What we need is a real Renaissance," he finally muttered. "A new humanism."

"Oh, god, do we ever," said Mélanie.

Pigeon had uttered the word like a shibboleth, and Mélanie responded like a reverent parrot. The real Renaissance would separate the pagan from the anhointed. Mélanie would be on the side of the gods.

"*Mélanie, est-ce que tu peux m'aider?*"

It was Jacynthe calling from the kitchen. Mélanie's face twitched. Then Matthew put down a decanter and got up.

"Is that not the name of your newspaper?" he asked, carrying on the conversation from the kitchen.

Pigeon resuscitated himself.

"That's it. *New Renaissance*."

"Jacynthe and I thought that might have been you one evening some time back selling them on Ste. Catherine Street. Is that part of — "

"It's not an elitist organization, Matthew, that's all," Mélanie interjected, leaping to his defence. "We want to bring our ideas to the

people, and to do that sometimes you have to meet them on their own ground."

"Of course, of course."

"We're not about to join the wine and cheese set, if that's what you mean. Not when there's so much banal complacency around. Do you realize that the world has been on the brink of utter annihilation precisely *five* times in the last four years? Powell F. Bugner has concrete evidence to suggest that unless world policies are completely overhauled, a London-inspired thermonuclear war will occur inevitably within the next two years. Inevitably! How can we sit idly by without warning people of this? It would be depraved! Insane!"

"Oh, come now, Mélanie," said Suzanne from behind a cigarette. "You are just being carried away."

Mélanie's face reddened.

"Suit yourself," she replied, picking up her wine glass.

"Those who have ears," muttered Jean Louis portentously.

Then Pigeon raised himself from his seat, as though cutting the conversation short for the moment, and called into the kitchen about the little gift he'd brought for his sister-in-law — by way of appeasement, Gilbert wondered. Would she like to hear it? Mircone was excellent, a genius, a man who knew just exactly how Mozart should be played because he'd taken the time to do some research into the subject (something their party had funded.) Besides, Mircone had discovered what was almost certainly the original manuscript to the Sonata in $F^{\#}$ major, with markings in the tempi completely contrary to accepted convention — it proved more than ever Mozart's direct *political* contribution to Beethoven.

("Did you know they'd met?" asked Mélanie. "In Vienna?") In fact, Beethoven's own F# major was on the other side as proof that the two shared the same humanist, revolutionary emotional outlook.

"Mélanie and I were in Place des Arts, you know." (Pigeon pulled his tie up closer to his Adam's apple and smiled.) "All very correct. They were listening to Beethoven, after all. This was *serious*. And none of them realized that the Kreutzer was written *as a joke*! They couldn't believe it. So Mélanie and I were killing ourselves laughing in the fourth row. Well, of course! It's *funny*, for god's sake. He knew the Baron he'd written it for couldn't play the damn thing, so he was gonna make it as hard as possible..." (Pigeon was one of those French Canadians who liked to say 'gonna' and 'coulda' because he really wanted his English to be colloquial.) "So we were laughing in the front rows and these people start to turn their heads -- You know, *sh-sh* -- But it was *funny*, for Christ's sake. I wanted to tell them. Come on! Take off your stuffed shirts! But Prizak, the violinist, *he* knew, and we could see him up on the stage smiling at us chuckling away. And everybody -- sh!-sh! But that's it. People don't know what the bloody music is supposed to be *doing*, for Christ's sake."

Pigeon moved the arm to start the record, then went back to his seat.

"Watch how slowly he plays this opening movement. You know it's incredible? Nobody would give this guy a contract?"

"Idiots!" declared Mélanie.

"The guy's a *genius* and nobody would give him a contract. We had to subsidize the record from the party. Here, listen to this part."

Evidently Ignizio Mircone knew what the master had intended

(Beethoven) and had clamped this idea round the music like a wire belt and stuffed it into a crate, not a loose piece anywhere. Gilbert couldn't listen. The only relief was Jacynthe's lobster, served steaming red in the middle of a *lumpen* adagio. Pigeon sat at the table enthralled. Mélanie let her fork lie and tilted her head back in a transport of serious concentration:

She had told Jacynthe that one of the things their party did was to get together Sunday evenings to sing Bach. They had even tried their hand at cantatas. Part of their programme was to steep themselves in anything to do with the 'Renaissance', sessions they found useful for their articles. (Both Mélanie and her husband contributed to *New Renaissance*.) Before dinner and in the middle of Mircone, Gilbert had glanced at some copies which Pigeon and his wife had evidently brought with them. One article began with the words, "In a Beethoven-like stroke of genius worthy of the discoverers of the DNA molecule, Rotzeder hit out at the anti-nuclearites and labelled them profiteers of Neanderthalism." (*New Renaissance*, it seemed, *liked* nuclear energy.) Another:

> Un-president Jimmy Carter's go-slow policy on nuclear research paralleling his pathological Iranomania can only be understood in the light of the Brotherhood of Malta's violent suppression of Bach's music during the 18th century until its real discovery — not by Rothschild lackeys and aristocratic hangers-on (i.e. the cultural red herring Mendelssohn) — but by the sublime Beethoven himself.

On the latter there were footnotes. The one Gilbert had seen referred him to Carl N. Friedenger, *The Rothschild Anti-Bach League: 1781-1832*.

And they *were* convinced. Jacynthe had told him about Mélanie having

given up her job at the *Cégep de Vieux Montréal* in order to devote herself full time to political work. She and Pigeon now got up at six every morning to be briefed from New York. They followed the activities of the hated Brotherhood with horrendous interest. They took turns going to political meetings to denounce public figures whom they wantonly accused of having attended conferences sponsored either by the hated Brotherhood or by the British in conjunction with the Israelis. They wore sandwich signs on their backs, tramped up and down Ste. Catherine Street selling newspapers or promoting whatever cause happened to have flown into their leader's head — the latest a debt moratorium for the Third World and half the population of North America. They extolled nuclear fusion, attacked environmentalists. Now whenever Jacynthe saw her sister she found her anxious and exhausted, and when she warned her about her health, she got lectured back about her own "bourgeois, parasitical existence." "Get on the bandwagon!" Pigeon had shouted at her. (He took her resistance personally.) Jacynthe had had violent quarrels with her sister too, especially when she found out that for the past two years Mélanie had been handing over the whole of her salary to the party — really to Powell F. Bugner himself, of whom she regularly spoke with a kind of subdued reverence.

"My god, what a talent!"

It was Mélanie. Ignizio Mircone had finished.

"Superb!" Pigeon declared.

Suzanne Legendre looked on aghast.

"You can't be serious," she said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean it's a bit like the emperor's new clothes, isn't it? You say it's good, and I'm sure you have a hundred reasons for believing it *is* good — and you can cite me any number of experts to agree with you, but to me it's all muddied up and it isn't Mozart at all."

"I'm afraid I agree," said Gilbert leaning forward. "He's imposed his notion of Beethoven — perhaps your group's notion of Beethoven — on the music and tried to make them sound exactly identical. Of course, they're not."

Pigeon looked away. "What can I say to you?" he said. He took his wine glass in his hand and sought refuge behind a long sip.

"Are you two musicologists?"

It was Mélanie from her side of the table.

"Pardon me?"

"You two are musicologists, I suppose. You have training in the subject?"

"I don't see how that has anything — "

"Oh. You have no training in the subject, but you're prepared to dispute with someone who has."

"Mélanie, I didn't know *you* could set up as an authority," her sister said, jokingly.

Mélanie gave her a black look.

"I didn't say *me*, Jacynthe, as you well know. I meant Mircone. *He* has done the research. None of you has. He has done the investigation into the *facts* of the matter. He's not offering subjective impressions."

"Oh, Mélanie, for heaven's sake."

"Oh? Oh? Maybe you should read what he has to say in some of his

articles. I'll gladly get them for you. He's certainly not prepared to take on faith what a bunch of old fools has been repeating for decades — which is the usual *wasp* way of going about things."

"*Eh, bien, Mélanie, arrête donc!*"

"— the usual WASP way of being contemptuous of everything new and fresh in anything at all, music, politics, buildings. Jacynthe tells me you're interested in old buildings, Gilbert. No doubt you're a *fédéraste* to boot. It stands to reason. Keep everything the same as it is. What is it you people say? 'Nice and dandy.' Nice and dandy. Personally I hate 'Nice and dandy' — just as I hate old buildings. Tear them down. They stink. Besides, they have cockroaches."

"*Mélanie, voyons!*"

But Mélanie was not going to stop now. She sat back from her plate, her fork in her hand, and as he watched her Gilbert couldn't help thinking that her eyes had that truculent, one-dimensional look lobsters have — not when they're cooked, flat and slightly soggy as they were in front of them, but when they claw about in the pound, pincers pegged lest they cannibalize each other before the customers get to them — a look of perpetual small time meanness, quick to take slight and always ready to get even.

"*Voyons, voyons. Pourquoi tous ces 'voyons?'* Am I saying something offensive to our wasp friends? Our Britophile, romantic conservative, protestant friends who like things just as they are? Oh, come off it, Jacynthe; I don't see why you have to be dedicated to mediocrity too. And that's precisely what it is, selfish mediocrity not to realize how close we all are to total annihilation. Am I to twiddle my thumbs and

worry about derelict buildings as your friends do or whether my frames match my paintings? Why don't you people *read* something for a change! What about this? Or this?" She reached into a briefcase beside her chair, pulled out some pamphlets, and started slapping them down on the table one at a time. "Does the neutron bomb not *count* for anything? Or that disgusting British conspiracy in Afghanistan?"

Jeff Hotham looked at her in incredulity. "That *what*?"

"The *British* conspiracy in Afghanistan. If you people would only be *informed* instead of believing what you see on television all the time, you'd know about British intentions to destabilize the Middle East."

"My god, no one can talk sense to you," Matthew said under his breath.

Mélanie sniffed with a kind of renewed contempt.

"Oh, I see. I see. Well, you can wallow about in your ignorance if you wish, Matthew, but don't expect everyone to be quite so comfortably bathetic."

"*Mé-la-nie*!"

"*O, tais-toi, Jacynthe. Tais-toi, enfin*! Your friends are made of crystal? They can't be told the honest truth? How do we know you're not a British agent?" she said, turning again on Matthew.

Jeff Hotham snorted.

"Of course, of course. We're ever so certain of our *Parti Québecois* cronies, aren't we? But it never occurs to you to ask. How *do* we know? How can we be sure?"

"Well, I suppose you'll just have to take my word for it, won't you?" said Matthew, smiling sardonically. "Just as I suppose we have to

assume that Jeff here isn't a leftover from the Confederacy."

"We have ways of looking behind that sort of thing," Mélanie announced darkly.

"*Mélanie! S'il te plait!*" Jacynthe switched to French. "Is this what your party stands for? Stupid paranoia? Can't you see what it's doing to you? My god, it's a kind of madness that you've got yourself involved in! Madness!"

As this began, Gilbert noticed Jean-Louis Pigeon drumming his fingers on the table top and looking away toward the corner of the ceiling.

"For heaven's sake, both of you, don't lose perspective completely. It's frightening!"

"Not so frightening as your smugness, Jacynthe, your horrible conceited smugness. I couldn't *bear* to live like you. It would fill me with despair. And with everything on the brink of collapse — it's appalling!"

For a moment nothing was said. Then Pigeon backed his chair slowly from the table.

"*Mélanie*," he said. "*Viens.*"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Jean-Louis, don't take it all so personally."

"I'm not taking anything personally, Jacynthe. It's just that I find it difficult to communicate with people who've stopped listening. It's unnatural. Anyway, you give Mélanie migraines with your kind of brutality."

"Brutality!"

"That's somewhat strong, isn't it?" Matthew called out.

But Pigeon didn't answer. Jacynthe got up from the table and followed them out into the hall. Gilbert could hear her pleading with her sister, then with Jean-Louis. But there was only silence from the other side, the rustling of their coats, and the short sharp zip of some boots. Gilbert heard the latch click in the hall as they let themselves out.

When Jacynthe returned her face was stark and white, and as she made the motion to sit down again it was as if another body did so, wearier and more unsociably resigned than Gilbert had ever seen her before. And though in the moment of silence that ensued she rallied, with tact and grace, with a shrug and a dismissive smile, and though people made the quiet sympathetic comments that are required under such circumstances, Gilbert knew, as they all did, that what she really wanted underneath was to retreat and to absorb the shock that had been done, to brood and put it where it belonged in the smaller order of things. And yet they also knew that dinner parties ended with dessert and with coffee — and in such a place as Jacynthe's probably with liqueur as well, and so, *fait de mieux*, and because for no apparent reason it seemed to fall to him to try to restore things, Gilbert told them about his minor discovery on the rue des Récollets, about the hole in the foundation that revealed the lattice of stonework upon which his speculations lay, about Lucien Bolduc and the executive committee of the City of Montreal, until even Matthew seemed interested and enquired a little about the history of that particular correspondence.

And later that night as Gilbert trudged toward the Metro station

at Champ de Mars, he wondered what could have possessed him to talk so feelingly about the building — he had taken an almost proprietary interest in it — to talk about it as though all by itself it could make the rough places smooth and join things somehow more finely together.

Architecture was frozen music: so Goethe thought. And if music, then harmony — and order, and the settled peace of prosperous relations. And yet how could he ignore what Ignizio Miroone had done to Mozart that night, or what Pigeon had done to the Kreutzer Sonata, cornering them, forcing them back, finally boxing them while their real spirits flashed out like wild things that didn't want to be caged? So much for harmony. He knew his Tolstoi well enough, but he couldn't help thinking that those who felt it was destructive sex that did it, flirtatiousness and posturing and romantic egotism that disturbed the flow of life and destroyed the peace of mind that people sought were only partly right. The world also abounded with aggressive ideas, especially among the armies of the educated in cities. They pushed forward and fought and rose by planting their heels squarely in the faces of their enemies. They believed that creation came about by destruction, and they made every effort to back the winning side, the tough side, to storm their posts and extend their authority. They established themselves like a strain of virulent and degenerate bees, in ever widening circles of terrain. They were part of the adventure. And they weren't all kooks like Pigeon — not by a long shot.

In the final analysis, as Gilbert watched Metro station after Metro station disappear before the window, he couldn't help wondering if he weren't being silly, taking his buildings and holding them up the way

he did like a cross to a vampire or a mirror to the Gorgon. Very likely he *was* being silly, silly and gratuitous and sentimental, and in his moment of uncertainty he was willing to believe Mélanie's assessment of him, though he knew she was a crackpot — violent and excessive, as marred as her husband or worse. Still he couldn't help wondering just what it was he was trying to do with himself, and well past midnight he collapsed in bed in a kind of despair.

The Restoration

Chapter 7

In any city there are shabby cafés, as there is permanent squalor or houses that crowd right up against the sidewalk. Then there are the shabby cafés that were once colourful and alive, like the polyglot East European places of the old 'Sir George' district, the district named after Sir George Williams University, that venerable anglo institution, adjunct of the YMCA, near neighbour to the Sally Ann, whose directors had some time ago adopted the even more patrician name 'Concordia' in fond homage to a spirit Gilbert felt more likely to be commemorated than encouraged. In the years after 1976, the refugees turned restauranteurs — from Hungary, from Czechoslovakia — had begun to move on, after that cosmopolitan heyday of the 1960s — to New York, to Toronto; the places were bought by enterprising East Asians, by locals who knew nothing of Budapest or Prague. Then the chestnut cake started fattening itself with margarine; the twelve types of coffee became nine, then six; the accents changed. What was left in mid-winter 1980 was the suspicion that good times, in a city as in a life, are fragile and evanescent and should be cherished while they last.

That, at least, was how Gilbert felt, what made him set the old

Stanley Street hangout as the place for the first rendezvous he'd had with Matthew Oates since his return, even though he knew Matthew didn't have much sympathy for his nostalgia.

"Oh, God, Gil. If you feel that way, maybe you should go back to Toronto," he had told Gilbert when the subject once came up. "The profile has changed, but speak to the Moroccans or the Armenians who've come here and see if they're so morose."

Old times — Gilbert had wanted to recover some of them, but Matthew, even out of his executive assistant suit, wouldn't go along. He didn't seem to want to discuss his dilemma with the church, though from what Jacynthe had implied it tormented him a great deal. He seemed nervous, pre-occupied, at once touchy and voluble about his political convictions and diffident about his spiritual ones.

"I no longer believe in sacrifice in quite the same way, Gil," he was saying in response to one of Gilbert's more obvious overtures. "I don't think the people — collectively — ought to sacrifice. The Québecois are tired of sacrifice. I can only applaud that."

"But what do you mean by sacrifice?"

"Oh, I think you know what I mean, Gil," Matthew said becoming impatient. "They're tired of the crumbs. They want to sit at the table. And I've found it more exciting than I can tell you that I'm involved in that evolution. We're going to win this thing. I can feel it."

These days someone like Matthew presented Gilbert with such a confused mixture of feelings, not the least of which was envy. Resentment, too, that as a newcomer he'd injected himself into politics with such skill and success, taking a line that was in Gilbert's view both irritating and perverse. He had to remind himself continually that in Quebec

a plurality of his own supposed compatriots believed in what Matthew now stood for and supported him, a factor that made Gilbert silent and suspicious, the circuits of his speech marked by caution and muffled indirection. One didn't speak out too frankly about political matters any more. It almost wasn't polite. Even earlier in Toronto a young American professor from York had declared she couldn't understand why everyone was so upset about the political situation and had looked amused when Gilbert told her it was because they were worried about their country breaking up. He realized she wasn't amused because she thought it couldn't happen, but because she thought it unimportant if it did.

"Well," Gilbert said, "Let me ask you something. You say you'll win. You may well. And god knows what will happen if you do. But I don't think it will happen, because — now, don't scoff, Matthew, just listen. Because I don't think the history of the thing is on your side. I mean that. To me — to me history has its own patterns, I think, institutional, even spiritual. I'm being obscure. No. You see, it's almost organic, Matthew, the way a tulip bulb contains itself; it develops the way it *has* to. And I don't see anything in the relation between French and English speaking people here that makes separation a logical outgrowth of failure or animosity or repression as you would have me believe. I really don't. So for Tolstoi Napoleon had to be defeated and — how does it go? — the hordes of men who poured east had to flow west again... Here the pattern of things turns around something else —"

"For example?"

"Compromise, perhaps? Accommodation?"

"And you don't think the people of Quebec have made their share of compromises and accommodations?"

"Yes, yes. I suppose they have. Of course they have. But listen, Matthew, what you and the government are proposing is to me like putting up a highrise building in the middle of an historic neighbourhood — you don't like my aesthetic arguments, I know. But it sticks out like a sore thumb."

Matthew turned away in mock disgust.

"Yes it does! And no amount of landscaping or tailoring or alteration of materials can conceal the fact that the proportions don't fit. It doesn't belong, like those wretched government buildings they throw up in Ste. Hyacinthe or Joliette with oversized Quebec flags and massive square-faced statues smack in the middle of the residential areas — bureaucrat progress, stupid arrogant theories masquerading as life. That's what they are, Matthew. That's exactly what they are."

Gilbert continued, pleading the connection of buildings to interior life, decrying the government's proposal (which he characterized as Matthew's own) for paternalism, for *dirigisme* as he put it, for a kind of historic opportunism. It was like ripping down a fine old home for a shopping mall. Oh, the mall would work, he said. Matthew and his *ministre* would have their seat in the U.N. beside Roumania or Quatar; the profs and the media types would be elevated to the embassy set, and the billions in taxes would be spent in their own way with the flag handy to wrap themselves in every time they made their share of mistakes. But in the process, they would have jackhammered a heritage, ripped out the spirit from the place.

"Ripped it out," he repeated, growing even more animated, "something that -- if we want to talk history -- something that has evolved over the years, piecemeal, making adjustments and corrections in the face of what's already been, not this imposed monolith you're contemplating."

But Matthew was only amused by his friend's vehemence. Quite often he took the high tone, and with his Yorkshire accent and his manners polished by innumerable television appearances and speaking engagements, Matthew intimidated Gilbert, made him feel he'd been over-dramatizing to compensate for some inferiority.

"I can't possibly agree with you, of course," he said. "Leave aside your aesthetic arguments -- which I do find offensive, by the way. You refuse to see the government's project as perfectly consistent with the pattern of history, as you call it. Every historical crisis in Canada from 1790 onward has involved the relations between the two 'founding people' to use Ottawa's favourite phrase -- always to the detriment of Quebec. Does my reading of history interest you?"

Gilbert sat back from the table and gave Matthew a provisional smile. Then he was obliged to listen as his friend touched on the standard highlights of the nationalist cause, the loyalist inspired 'separation' of 1791, Upper and Lower Canada created by act of the legislature because it served the interests of the dominant race; fifty years later the Act of Union superseding that separation, again because it served the interests of British Canadians, by now in the majority and anxious about their recalcitrant neighbours dragging down plans for canals and railroads. And for Matthew, well schooled in his tendency, every major succeeding event reconfirmed that pattern of dominance and

repression: *les Patriotes*, Riel, the Conscription crisis, French Canada always isolated and weakened, never free enough to make its own mistakes, outmanoeuvred by British governors, outvoted by alien majorities in unequal unions, in illegitimate referenda — in both World Wars — betrayed by their own religious elite.

"That's the pattern of history, Gil, if you care to look at it, and what self-respecting people wouldn't want to put an end to it? And by the way, thank god for the profs and the media types, because they're the spiritual inheritors of the old liberal middle classes. Really. The true descendants of Dr. Chenier. That's the pattern, and with each and every indignity suffered the movement towards national liberation gains in intensity. *La revendication*. It culminates now, when we put an end to this nineteenth century contraption, the overcentralized unworkable federal slum which humiliates both our countries. In ten years even those like yourself who've opposed us most vociferously will recognize how right we've been. Believe it, Gil."

Doggedly Gilbert would not believe it. He shook his head. He wanted to know what his friend's contempt for the federal system was based on, and he listened, his lips pursed in obstinate refusal, to the reply.

"Ask yourself, Gil. Could the federal system, right now, at this moment, solve *any* international problems? I'm quite serious. Could you federate Ulster with the Republic of Ireland? Do the Latvians, the Lithuanians, the Ukrainians truly wish to be federated with the Russians? Could you federate the Palestinians with the Israelis? It would be lunacy! You might just as well re-establish the dual monarchy. No,

Gil. In a context of grievance and subordination, where historic bitterness exists, federalism is completely unworkable. 'Two scorpions in a bottle.' Remember. The premier never originated these sentiments. Durham did, 140 years ago. 'Two nations warring in the bosom of a single state.' Has anything changed?"

For Matthew, nothing had. The litany of thwarted hopes came streaming from his lips almost as though they were his own. English Canadians still had only contempt for the French, whom they regarded as an amiable lot of bumpkins who couldn't survive in a competitive environment and who were generally speaking misled by resentful and vindictive demagogues. It was precisely Durham's opinion, and Matthew wasted no time in reminding Gilbert of that fact:

"Besides," he added, "there *are* new things that come into the world, things that don't take forever to evolve themselves. A new hive of bees with a new queen, let's say. They swarm, and there's a lot of fuss and commotion for a while, and then they settle down to being bees again like any others, only somewhere else by themselves -- and with a renewed energy to make something more of themselves. Let's use that pattern if we're to talk patterns."

Gilbert let this point pass and looked down nervously at the table before he answered.

"I suppose what surprises me more than anything else about you, Matthew, is that as a Christian, a priest -- (former priest?) --" He looked up at his friend pointedly. "It's that you've become so attached to the language of liberation, the loud voice, the demands. Oh, I know. Things have changed. But doesn't it seem to you that there's a spirit

abroad? It calls for the elevation of those with the most articulate grievances. *La revendication* — that's what you said, the hour of the eloquent victim. Really, it just fills me with despair. This place — the city, the country could be a model. That sounds like a platitude, doesn't it. But it *could* be — clean, healthy, vital instead of a tacky, quarrelsome, neuraesthenic cat-pit, everyone bristling at what he sees or reads, everyone hiding his malignity with hypocritical rationales, secretly cheering on more scratching and biting. Oh, sure. It will all change once sovereignty is achieved and the new hive's established. The stings will heal. But can't you see that that won't happen, Matthew? The country isn't a bee-hive — Is that too easy to say?"

Gilbert found himself moving forward and then backwards from the table, trying to engage his friend and yet aware all along of the futility of his attempt.

"I remember the arguments you used to put to me. But we're really not like the United States in 1775 with 3000 miles of ocean separating the combatants or like Norway and Sweden because the Swedes didn't even recognize that another language existed."

"Oh, bullshit, Gil."

"It's true!"

"I don't believe that."

"Well, let's agree to disagree on that one. What's happening here — it's lamentable, Matthew, I swear; the whole fabric of understanding and tolerance being torn up just at a time when — excuse me for saying this — when more generous people were trying to extend it. It's like watching what happened after that old crone sold the Van Horne mansion

and the wrecking balls moved in. What could you do? It reaches a point where you can't reason with people."

Matthew snorted.

"I know. You don't like my aesthetic analogies."

"No, Gil. I have no objection to them in themselves. It's just that they're so utterly beside the point. No group of people could be more dedicated to the preservation of French culture than the present government, and the present minister, if I may say so. I work for him, by the way, and I can vouch for that. In fact, to shift things to a more congenial subject, I want to tell you that that's partly why I'm here this afternoon, because the Minister is exceptionally interested in your discovery. I mentioned it to him, and it's just the kind of thing the ministry would like to be kept informed about, and I'd be the first one to welcome the opportunity to prove to you how different things will be once the referendum is settled and put behind us. I've been authorized to tell you the Minister would like to extend every assistance to you in your research, and that, I might add, includes some modest financial backing."

"Oh?"

"Absolutely."

"Well." Gilbert looked up at his friend slyly. "Does this mean that the Ministry of Cultural Affairs is going to move in and finish my work for me?"

"Oh, Gil, for heaven's sake," Matthew said, laughing. "Try — try to be more accommodating. There are special funds available for work dealing with *le patrimoine*. All it takes is an application."

Matthew reached into his briefcase, withdrew a small folder, and held it across the table. When Gilbert hesitated, he held it out even more firmly.

"Take it, for god's sake. It won't poison you."

Gilbert took the papers.

"By the way, I also happen to know that Suzanne Legendre is toying with the idea of a film on the early architecture of the city. She asked me to find out if you'd be interested in helping with the research."

"Suddenly I'm in demand, I see." Gilbert shrugged. "Well, I don't see why not. But you know, I have no idea what good this will do as far as Mercer-Granville is concerned, because I can't prove a thing without copies of the building records, and I'm afraid they're sitting under lock and key in the company's offices — they're on strike, you'll recall — and I've been flatly denied permission to photocopy them."

"Denied by whom?"

"My father."

"I see... Any idea why?"

"None. Absolutely none — apart from his own mule-headedness and because he's touchy about those letters to the City. Anyway, he won't budge. That I'm sure of."

"Can't you get what you need from the Municipal Archives?"

"Mm." Gilbert shook his head. "The kind of records I'm talking about go back too far. Builder's bills, that kind of thing. I know many of the deeds here can be traced through the Sulpicians who had seigneurial rights to much of the area of the old city, but nothing is on record in this case, apart from any bills that might exist, and they would date

back 275 years. But if you think I can get my hands on that file again..."

"Listen, let me see what I can do," said Matthew looking at his watch. "Really, I must be off. The Minister is due to speak in Varennes this evening at 8, and I have a dozen things to attend to. Not to mention that the media have decided to appoint me, of all people, as an expert in the division of crown assets.

"Oh?"

Matthew got up to fetch his coat.

"Yes, and I've had to cram like stink to keep up with my over-inflated reputation."

Gilbert made what was intended to be a sympathetic chuckle. Then Matthew approached the table again, this time with his coat on.

"Really, I hate to fly out on you like this, but it's an incredibly busy time. I've never seen anything like it. Will you call me if you hear of any development in this Mercer-Granville thing? I meant what I said about that —"

He pointed to the folder lying on the table near Gilbert's hand.

"Oh, and —" He seemed to grope for more to add to the conversation he'd cut short. "When things settle down a bit, maybe we can get together and I'll set you straight on political activism in the church."

Gilbert nodded & smiled, and yet Matthew, it seemed, had something more to say.

"And listen, Gil. If you feel so strongly, why don't you get involved? Do something concrete. I mean it."

Gilbert watched his friend climb up the stairs and out into the street. Then he flipped idly through the pages of the application

Matthew had given him and wondered whether he'd bother to fill it out. Already he'd convinced himself he knew what Matthew really thought of his work. In the theater of Matthew's political views, he played the role of the crackpot antiquarian standing in the way of progress, defender of the federal system, issuer of papal edicts inveighing against contraception and priestly incontinence. As Gilbert slowly finished off the rest of his coffee, he tried to imagine the tide of affairs directed by a phalanx of vested, attaché-cased Matthews, fully briefed, precise as their morning shaves and their dry-cleaning, and himself, Gilbert Rollins, from his irrelevant garret charged with the task of keeping an old-world grace alive in people's hearts, Gil Rollins, silly sentimentalist of old buildings and constitutions, wistfully reproving modern lines and watertight compartments, spluttering vainly over [illegible], or whispering, as the aged do, about questions long ago decided, like temperance and toleration. He wondered if Matthew might be right. Maybe he should get involved he thought, but he wasn't quite sure when or how.

The Restoration

Chapter 8

Two weeks had gone by — a February thaw and a federal election: victory of the old party and the old chief. Instead of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, it could have been Sir John A. MacDonald, Gilbert thought to himself, and he wondered if that was what people in his part of the world liked best: fierce resistance to change. As he drove towards his parents' house early that evening, he had to pass by a Bar-B-Q chicken stand that had once been the site of a Lutheran church. It had never been an historic church or even a particularly handsome one, and yet Gilbert remembered it for two reasons. The first was the striking blue stained-glass lettering over a side window that in the noon sun emblazoned the old Christian maxim: He that would gain his life must first lose it. The second was the fact that a large shopping center plus parking lot had been built directly behind and to the side. It was an especially ugly shopping center — cheap drug store, cheap five and dime, and it drove the congregation to despair. Six months later the church buildings burned mysteriously to the ground. A new church — and a much finer, richer church it was — was built with the insurance money a mile and a half deeper into the suburb.

"So I see you're finally on your way," Gilbert announced as he walked into his parents' kitchen.

"Oh!"

Adele looked up from the boxes she was packing.

"It's you, you stinker. You frightened me. Can I get you some tea?"

Gilbert sat down at the table.

"Well, I've got my dinnerware packed and half the silver, that's something," Adele said. She plugged in the electric kettle and sat down beside her son.

"Where's Father?"

"Oh, you know." She pointed her finger down to the basement and looked away for a moment. "Listen," she said. "I just want you to know I think what Norm did was really rotten. I mean that. Really rotten."

"What."

"Oh, you know what I mean. He told me about those building records you needed."

"Oh?"

"And you know that's just like him. Always that bloody place of

his before anything else — even his own family. I remember when your baby sister died, I asked him to take three days off. Just three days, I was feeling so miserable. And do you know what he said? 'I'm not indispensable, you know.' — Hah! Tell me another one. Not three days. That was too much. It still burns me up to think about it."

"Well it won't do you any good dwelling on that."

Adele looked at her son more brightly. "That's just what Dr. Boll said!" and she smiled. "Did I tell you I might have a job?"

"No, where?"

"Oh, Dr. Boll has a colleague who's looking for a medical secretary. Now, I haven't done that kind of thing, but I used to be able to type sixty words a minute on those old machines, so... But it's not certain. Anyway I just might move to Ontario."

Adele paused to see what effect this would have.

"That's new, isn't it?"

"Well, I suppose... I'm just so fed up with the politics here. It's alright for you. You speak French and you've got to be here — I mean for your research and whatall, but I'm just so worried. What if they separate? All the hospitals will be turned into French and all the doctors — good English doctors — will want to leave. What future is there for somebody like me? If I should fall sick — I mean, I have to *worry* about these things. That's why I'm not going to buy any property. You just don't *know* any more. I thought of a small place down by the river. As a matter of fact I had an agent take me down for a look, but with things the way they are now, I'd just as soon leave... Of course, there's my family."

Adele got choked up and had to turn away.

"And Father?"

"Oh, he won't leave here. He's going to fight it out. Leaving would be giving in to them. That's what he says. 'I haven't lived here all my life just to toady to a bunch of Frenchmen.' You know how he is, though there isn't much he can do about it, if you ask me. No, he'll probably go live with his brother and the two of them can shout at the television together when the news comes on."

"So he's not helping you pack, I see."

Adele mangled up a serviette and turned away.

"Oh, he's down watching his game." She got up to go back to her boxes. "If you want to look at those things I told you about, they're down in the playroom."

'Those things' were part of the attraction Adele had vamped up to get her children to help with the moving. They sat in the basement in a forlorn circle like Christmas without wrapping paper. More loot. If the Salvation Army were Vikings, this is what they'd come home with — except there were perfectly good pieces of furniture thrown in here, too, a sewing cabinet, a tea-wagon, some bookcases. Adele was serious. Even Norm got into the act. Rousing himself from a second period intermission, he came into the other part of the basement.

"So boy, you finally made it."

"Yes, I did."

"Well," Norm said, his voice suddenly becoming kinder. "Your mother and I thought you might want some of these bookcases. She's got no room for them in her apartment."

When Pam arrived with doggy-eyed Randy she was ecstatic. "Even the tea-wagon? Geez, I feel *funny* taking all this. Look Randy, there's some wire you might be able to use — Mother, are you *sure*?"

"Sure I'm sure. Take it. I've got no room for it and your father certainly hasn't."

"Well, in that case — Are you sure you don't want any?" She looked over to where Gilbert was standing.

"No, no. I don't want anything."

But when she found out that Norm had given his son all the bookcases, she was miffed.

"You could have used one of those for your research, Randy, don't you think?" She managed to say this audibly, so Gilbert could hear.

But Randy wanted to measure the back of their Honda to see if the tea-wagon would fit.

Norm sat through this ordeal blankly, without objection. Adele had decided. That was his attitude; only Adele was 'not a well woman.' So he absorbed the humiliation and hurried back to the last five minutes of the third period while his children trooped upstairs for tea and backbiting. Gilbert had seen it often enough, Adele running the circle of Norm's failings and her discontent like a hampster on a treadmill, undermining him, justifying herself while he sat in the basement, and then Norm, oblivious Norm, wandering upstairs to pet her on the arm. Then Adele would cast him a look of guilty innocence and turn to her children less ingenuously as if to confirm that they were confederate in a secret judgment Norm was too woebegone ever to understand. And when Norm retreated back downstairs she would often sigh and say, "But you know he's

been so good to me. Sometimes I really feel sorry for him."

That was how it was, how it had so often been. And Gilbert had once taken his sordid Oedipal pleasure in it — the repository of her confidences, her complaints, witness to her sufferings until one day he learned that it had been Lowell's turn, too, once, that he had been the favoured one, the privileged ear, until his marriage to Brenda. Then it had all dried up. Lowell could no longer be counted on. Gilbert took his place, and she waged war against both, husband and eldest son, with the righteousness of one betrayed, using her confidences and her criticisms, until Gilbert cooled and drew apart, and Pam rushed in to fill the void. That was how she used her children, extensions of her frailties and inner hatreds, always, by virtue of Norm's blank obedience, in the ascendency, giver of favours, patroness of secrets, certain of little else, though this time in her kitchen surrounded by boxes, with her sloppy pants and her dustnet she was too careworn to be jaunty.

"I wanted to tell you all something, but I didn't want Norm to hear."

She paused for a moment.

"I'm asking Norm for a divorce."

Pam looked wide-eyed. "Ooh, wo-o-w," she said softly. "Are you sure?"

"Well, I visited a lawyer last week and the papers are being drawn up. The only problem is the grounds —" She looked furtively towards the basement door. "And that's why... It can't be adultery. Norm has been a very good husband to me, at least in that way. But I don't want to leave things for three years — I think that's what they need for marriage breakdown — so the lawyer advised me to draw up a 'balance sheet' and to list as many negative things as I could."

"What for?" asked Gilbert

"For the judge to examine, to see if there are grounds."

"But what grounds are you using?"

"Well, that's just why I don't want Norm to know about it. The lawyer's advice was that under the circumstances the only course I could take was to plead mental cruelty." Adele looked away. "It will just kill Norm to know — he's always been so good to me in his own way — oh, I don't know. The way I feel now, I'd just as soon walk out and forget the whole thing." Adele got up and went to the stove. "And then I say, 'You've done your share. You *deserve* something', but if he saw that list, I don't know... It would just kill him."

"I don't know if your lawyer was so wrong, Mother," said Pam. "I can think of a few things I'd like to tell a judge about Father's behaviour."

Adele smiled wanly.

"Well, I'm serious. How about never telling you how much money he earned?"

"I put that."

"Have you ever wondered how much he has in the bank? He won't tell you that either. That's pretty cruel, if you ask me."

"I suppose so, eh?"

"And what about not taking one day off work when Patsy died? Geez, Randy, I don't know what I'd do if you ever did something like that." Pam folded her hands over her stomach. "I just think that's so — so *heartless*. I couldn't believe it when you told me. Not to mention how free he was with the back of his hand when we were little. I wouldn't

mind letting a few people know about that, eh Randy? I mean talk about neanderthal child rearing practices or what."

"How do you mean?" said Gilbert.

"Oh, Gil, don't you remember? He'd come home snorting and fuming -- 'Get this cleaned up! What in the name of blazes is going on here!' God, when I think of it. Nowadays you can be denounced for that kind of stuff."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Pam," said Gilbert.

"You can, Gil! In Sweden Father would be in prison for some of the things he did."

"I think what Gil is referring to, honey, is the discretionary powers of magistrates with regard to medical testimony in cases where full abuse hasn't been clearly ascertained —"

"Oh Randy, he didn't say anything about discretionary powers."

"I think Gil was saying —"

"Well, maybe not prison, exactly, but if I were a judge I'd sure give him a piece of my mind."

"Oh, your father's always been a very old-fashioned man, Pam," Adele began, her voice shifting to another level, as it always did when she became philosophical — softer, more remote, a touch self-righteous, spoken not from a mountain (that would be too presumptuous), but from a small pastoral knoll of resignation and understanding. "You can't change him. He's always been the kind of man who counted on appearances. As long as the neighbours didn't know. Marriage, the children. As long as people could see the surface, then everything was fine. Dr. Boll agrees. It's like the house. He doesn't want a sign on the lawn — god knows how we're going to sell it without one these days, but he won't have it.

Doesn't want everyone knowing his business, he says. Can you *believe* it? I said, Norm, for heaven's sake, we've *got* to sell the house. I have no pension. And you know what he said? He said, 'You'll be provided for.' Just like that. Of course when I asked him to explain exactly what *that* meant, he clammed right up. That was enough. I'd be provided for. Honestly, sometimes I don't know whether to laugh or cry, though the agent said not to worry. There's lots of houses sold without signs, so — I don't know. You can't talk to Norm. At least *I* can't."

"God!" said Pam. "I hope you put *that* on your list."

The next morning, after Randy had got the van and the four of them had loaded it, Gilbert realized that Adele had managed to keep the lion's share of the furniture for herself. There it was set up in her new apartment on Gouin Boulevard — dining room set, sofas, organ (she'd had that moved separately), while Norm was left with his tools, his old wardrobe from the basement, and, of course, the colour television. He was moving to his brother William's place, wasn't he? How much stuff would he need there? When Gilbert and Randy drove back at eleven o'clock that night with a mirror they'd forgotten, they caught Adele off-guard, red-eyed from crying, her face glinting in the hallway safety light, slathered with vaseline or nightcream for her wrinkles. He remembered Pam saying she never liked short men. And on the way home Randolph broached the topic that had been on his mind all day.

"I was just wondering as to the bookcases Father gave you -- whether you might be able to spare the endpieces. Pam was thinking of the research I was embarking on, and..."

Gilbert gave him the endpieces.

The Restoration

Chapter 9

Suzanne Legendre phoned the following night, just as Matthew had said she would. At first they talked a little tentatively about his work, about architecture and the old city; then she asked him, circuitously, what he felt about federal involvement in the area. Had they made the right decision about the waterfront? Why had they taken over Georges Etienne Cartier's former home when they had just let it sit there for five years? He could detect the hint of irritation in her voice whenever the subject of the federal government arose, as well as the unspoken invitation, which he declined, to join her in her criticism.

But she was lively and curious in her own way and sympathetic to his work. She wanted to collaborate, to make a team. Underneath he felt she liked him, and he responded to her frankness and vivacity and agreed to see her when she asked. And once he had climbed the stairs to her flat on de Castlenau with the plants and the cats, with the oil furnace in the hall as in the old days and the kitchen cupboards up to the ceiling, the first thing he noticed was the smell. As always he was dog-like in new quarters, reckoning with his nose the close over-heated air of Montreal winters indoors, mixed with the tell-tale odour of cats and

cigarettes and perfume. That was Suzanne Legendre and would remain so, fixed on his memory in some ways more deeply than her image or her speech.

"*Bonjour, Gilbert!*" she said, kissing him on the cheek. "I'm so happy you could come. *Bien, je vais te présenter à mes chats. Voici Rataplat, Minou, et, enfin, Clarinette.*"

"Clarinette?"

"Yes, because she is long and black and because she is at once mysterious and a little harsh, just like the instrument, no? If I had a big ginger coloured tom-cat I would name him hautbois. I want so much to have that. Don't you think that would be a good name? Hautbois — but maybe I get too much influenced by Prokofieff."

"That was the duck."

"*Pardon?*"

"The oboe was the duck."

She smiled back at him. "They are all my children anyway, I know that. Here, I am making tea and you can have some cookies which I baked myself, and I am going to sit and be serious with you for a minute because," she said, sweeping Rataplat off a chair, "because I want to do this film with you, since you are very, very knowledgeable about these things. I know, as I trust Matthew's judgment completely — and because I know a marvellous cameraman, Jean-Paul David, who can do justice to those buildings, make something very, very artistic out of them. I can just *feel* that. I want those details like those big hooks for the iron shutters they used and the stonework and the huge beams inside. If we could get into that wonderful building of yours — What's the place? Mercer Granville? We could show how the old walls were covered over with

whatever they used. Nothing commercial, Gilbert." (She softened the "g" which he found rather charming.) "Everything — *eh, bien, de bon goût, comme il faut.* I'm persuading you. I know it. It's not every day I can get Jean-Paul, and it just so happens he's available."

Gilbert sat drinking his tea and appraising this nervous, energetic woman who sat before him with her long straight blond hair and the cigarette between her lips. She smoked too much, he thought, almost involuntarily. In the morning her bread wasn't fresh.

"What's in it for you?" he found himself asking.

"I'm sorry?" Suzanne seemed a little taken aback. He realized he had sounded almost accusatory.

"What's your interest?" he said, trying to soften himself.

"*Ecoute, Gilbert.* I'm a film-maker. *Journaliste et cinéaste. C'est mon métier, enfin.* I'm interested in things that are *alive* and fresh, and one thing I promise you, *je ne suis pas une vendue, si tu me le permets.* But, if you mean what *motivates* me, well, maybe I can answer. I used to know a person who lived in an old — how do you call them? *Les maisons faites de pierres brunes* — Brownstone! An old brownstone. There were two of them on Drummond, very very nice properties. Well, some Greek or Hungarian bought them and was going to tear them down, just like that, stained glass windows, everything. Except that the Ministry of Cultural Affairs stepped in and informed him that the buildings were within 500 feet of a cultural property and had the City revoke his permit to demolish. So in the dead of night he brings in a bulldozer and knocks down the front of them anyway. Stones, oak banisters sticking out the windows — he makes a mess, until the police come and stop him.

Then you know what the City does? *C'est écoeurant, Gilbert. Je trouve ça écoeurant!* After a court case that lasts maybe one day, they let him finish the job. Paf! Two buildings gone. So there's my interest, if you want to know. I can't tell you who that Greek or Hungarian paid in City Hall, but I can tell you he paid someone, and not some *petit fonctionnaire* either. Someone high up. And maybe it wasn't money under the table, but he built a nice swimming pool or redecorated his country house, something like that. That's my interest. If a little film helps to make people aware of what they've got to lose, maybe it becomes a bit harder for the bribes to happen. That's one thing."

Gilbert smiled and Suzanne lit up another cigarette.

"Listen. Let's be frank with one another. Matthew told me about your problems with the building records you need, and I also think I can help. So there's that, too, if you want to listen."

"Oh?"

"That's right. I happen to know some people in the union that is on strike now at your father's company. Let's just say they're friends of mine. They could get you what you needed."

"What do you mean?"

"Just that. You need the records. They can get you the records. It's not so difficult."

"You're not suggesting that — that we just walk in and take them."

"No," said Suzanne blowing a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. "Not so easy as that, of course, but not so very hard either."

Gilbert sat back in his seat and shook his head.

"You certainly do get around, don't you. I had no idea."

Suzanne tossed her long hair backward, looked at him, and shrugged. "*La vie, là, c'est pas toujours compliquée*. Besides, where there's a will there's a way. So if you want to think about it, think. Let me know. But on the subject of the film, I hope it's yes. No ifs and buts. Yes, and that's all. *Paf!*" And she slapped her hands together as though she were cleaning off chalk. When he took another half moment to hesitate, she started in on him again. "*Mon dieu*, Gilbert, it would be a really *good* film. You don't believe me? I'll show you some of my other work. You'll see how good it is. And I know you've got all sorts of corners and angles no one has thought about, so don't waste the chance and make me so mad at you I don't know what. Say you'll do it and that's all."

"Of *course* I'll do it. It's just that when I've just received a proposition for breaking and entering I get a mild case of cold feet from time to time."

"*Ben, Gil-bert! C'est pas si serieux que ça.* Breaking and entering. I know some people who know their way around the building and who wouldn't mind getting back at some of those bosses, if you'll pardon me the expression. That's all! They know the combination to that safe because they've been asked to go in there a hundred times. It's no big secret."

"How did *you* know they're in a safe?"

"Because you opened your big mouth that night at Jacynthe's, *idiot*. Is it classified, your research?"

"No, no. Not at all."

"So...?"

"So, I don't know. I don't know if I'm all that keen."

"Well. You think about it. Take your time."

Gilbert felt as though he'd just been offered a used car. Then Suzanne asked him if he'd brought his manuscript. They spent the rest of the evening looking over some of the photographs he'd taken, selecting some, rejecting others. That weekend Suzanne promised to introduce him to Jean-Paul David, but as it happened she had to leave town and couldn't manage to arrange it.

The Restoration

Chapter 10

At the end of the month, quite by accident, Gilbert ran into Jacynthe Danielle in a food shop in the basement of Eaton's. Matthew, it seemed, was away in Quebec City preparing for the opening of the National Assembly referendum debates, scheduled for April, and since she was more or less hibernating Jacynthe invited him over. They took the metro at McGill and sat kittycorner to each other listening to the erratic shuddering of the doors closing, then the three distinctive electrical notes the cars made on acceleration. Place des Arts, Berri-de-Montigny — Gilbert looked up to the empty squares toward the ceiling of the car, all lit up for no purpose.

"You know," said Jacynthe, looking up too. "I thought the city might have taken all the advertising down after they banned English, but then I heard the signs somehow caught fire and caused millions of dollars of damage."

"Spontaneous combustion?"

Jacynthe smiled wryly.

"I suppose you could think that. God knows, things are bad enough. Do you know something? It's reached the point where I hardly know who

to talk to any more. I'm serious! And I don't mean just Mélanie. Ooph." She waved that thought away with the back of her hand. "I mean friends, colleagues. *Colleagues*, can you believe it? People I've worked with for years! If you're not on their side, then, *mon dieu*... Even Matthew."

"Matthew?" Gilbert said as they got up to transfer.

"Oh, yes. My dear Matthew. I told him I would *not* be voting YES, and he took it as a personal affront. After all he was *working* for! How could I? How dare I?" Jacynthe shook her head. "Everything is so intolerant, Gilbert. So aggressive underneath. It's not just us. I know families of friends of mine where people don't talk to each other — brothers, husbands and wives. The contempt is almost beyond belief!

"And I must tell you when I watch our *premier ministre* heaping his sarcasm on Ottawa, on *lès autres*, on *les fédéralistes aux fesses serrées*, and I see the homage that little man inspires from those who feel dispossessed in life, I wonder about politics and the surrogate victories all those people take from it — the educated ones, the uneducated ones. It makes no difference. So much petty vindication, Gilbert. *Toutes ces revendications de mauvaise foi*. I'm fed up with all of them, you know. I would just like the whole horrible dialogue to stop."

"Of course, it's not going to stop."

"No, it's not going to stop."

The Bonaventure train rounded the slow curve to Victoria Square when he and Jacynthe got off and stepped onto the lengthy escalator to the surface and the lingering cold. She wondered out loud if it was just their own generation that had caught a disease — from the 1960's perhaps. Like a virus, you 'caught' ideas — liberation, collective

maturity, victimization — and these ideas led to certain stock responses, a perennial edginess, a kind of reflexive paranoia, like a body storehouse for vitamins except in this case for hatreds and inflammatory political stances.

"In any case they're always primed to set the building on fire, no? The slightest shock, the least provocation brings it on. In my opinion that describes our journalists and politicians. And aren't they the same anyway? Urbane, wonderfully sophisticated, thin-skinned, filled with barely concealed resentment. They seem to carry a little match in their hands even when they're on their best behaviour."

Gilbert smiled and nodded.

"I suggested this to Matthew — who doesn't fit, by the way — and do you know what he said to me? He said I was guilty of *parochialism in time* — some idea he stole from Bertrand Russell. He said what I was describing was the inheritance of two hundred years of racial strife. And to prove this he asked me if I knew that Montreal had once been the capital of the two Canadas? I said no. I'm terrible at history. He said that it was the Montreal English who had brought that arrangement to an end by heaving the furniture out the windows of the Parliament Buildings and then burning them to the ground. All because a British governor had decided to be lenient to some of our rebels. Oh, well, I said. So it's not the inheritance of the 1960's. I'm fed up with it anyway."

"I'm sorry to hear this, in a way. I thought you two were getting along just fine. Didn't he just tell me he's decided to leave the priesthood?"

"Leave the priesthood! He's just exchanging one priesthood for another! That's a cliché, and I apologize for that, but it's true anyway. Now I'm not exotic enough for him. Maybe I speak English too well." She turned to Gilbert. "Look, I'm sorry if I'm bitter. It's just that I hate to see him becoming decisive and categorical like all the rest — and satisfied with how clever he is and firm and glib in the bargain, continually treating me like a member of the Opposition. Politics! *Il est très politicisé*, as we say. For me it's like the salt on the road from those trucks. You can't drive without it, and at the same time it gets into every corner and eats away at everything that runs.

"And he's so jumpy! Each newscast he scrutinizes for evidence of bias — usually found. Did they show the premier in a bad angle before he began his speech? Did they give the federalist side more camera time? Don't I admit the anglophone outlets are the worst offenders? And often he has a point, Gilbert; I don't deny it. It's just that — I don't know. There seems to be room for nothing else in the day. Art, one's personal life, God if it comes to that, though heaven knows I'm glad he's off that topic — every subject reduced to insignificance before this besetting passion, like little boys fighting in the streets."

"Pardon my saying this, Jacynthe, but surely you *knew* Matthew's political attitudes when you met him? You've known for years. He's hid nothing from you."

"Oh, of course, I *knew*, Gilbert, but then nothing is so graceful as a love affair, no? Can I say that? When every part of the other person is intriguing, every difference quaint or mildly amusing? It's only later that you realize how fiercely your loved ones cling to their

convictions — religious, political — how they root themselves in their beings like dandelions so you can't just reach down and yank them up. They come with their ideas — stubborn, adult ideas. When you know those stubborn, adult ideas then you can say you know the person."

"So now you know Matthew?"

"Oh yes! Now I know Matthew Oates!" She laughed a little as she fumbled for her keys. "He's a wonderful, gifted man, Gilbert, and I'm boring you complaining about him, I'm sure. But after all these months of trying to get him to abandon his scruples about the church — Here, you can put your boots over there. After telling him it wouldn't change, that there wouldn't be any sudden enlightened encyclicals from a liberal papacy — Coffee? Can I get you coffee?"

She kept talking at him as she disappeared down the hallway.

"After competing with that accursed spiritual adviser of his —" There was a pause for a moment before she returned. "— He turns and devotes the same energies to political causes that have nothing whatsoever to do with him. I told him that, too. My God, Gilbert," she said collapsing into a chair. "Can't people just like each other enough to put aside their differences?"

"I'm sure they can."

"Oh, that's all right. You can tease me with my own banalities. Anyway, I'm going to tell you that sometimes when I think of Matthew and those politicians he's involved with as they articulate their centuries of racial bitterness, I think that history is like a revolving door on a department store, one that's going too fast. You choose your moment to jump in only it takes you around, catches at the back of your heels, and

it never lets you out the other side."

"Altogether too bleak for me, Jacynthe," Gilbert replied, laughing. Then, with his hands in his pockets, he walked over to the window and looked out over the same harbour view he'd seen that night six weeks ago when Mélanie and her husband had come.

"Did I tell you Suzanne Legendre is interested in doing a film using some of my research?" he called out.

Jacynthe came in with a small tray.

"Yes, Matthew told me about it. I'm sure you're very pleased."

"I am in a way. It makes what I'm doing seem a little less remote." He paused, picked up a mug, and warmed his hands on it. "What do you know about her anyway?"

"About Suzanne?"

"Yes. I've really only talked to her once since she was here. I'm not sure how to place her."

"And I'm not the right person to ask."

"Oh?"

"Well..." She shrugged.

"You two don't get along?"

"I'm not going to spoil your working arrangement. She's a very good director. She knows her job. What I've seen is very thorough. Professionally, I would say you're in excellent hands."

"Professionally."

"What do you want me to say to you? She works with Matthew. The Minister is, shall we say, aware of her. She is active in the regional councils of the party. Vice-president, perhaps. I don't know a good

deal more."

"Except that you don't much care for her."

"She is the kind of woman who once called me *une sale bourgeoise* to my face. Jokingly, of course. I've tried for Matthew's sake to forgive that sort of thing, but I find it hard to warm to people who take liberties like that. It's a weakness of mine."

"You find her rude?"

"Rude. Vulgar. Another one with ideas. Me, I just want to be left alone. I want to cultivate my garden. I want to look at beautiful things. I want to feel serene. Maybe for Suzanne that's vulgar. In any event, she is one of those women with a mental gun, fully loaded, no safety catch. Bang, bang, you're dead. Maybe you don't find that. Maybe with you she's nice. Who am I to tell? But with me, conversation is a minefield. I have to watch where I step, unless of course I want to have a big explosion. Who needs that? I've had more than enough of that."

When he got home, he wondered about Jacynthe, so critical in one way, vulnerable in another. When he worked that week her face would often appear to him, the tiny, fine features, the depth of stubbornness they concealed — and yet intelligent stubbornness, not at all childish, or capricious, or one-dimensional. He couldn't help thinking Matthew was a lucky man. She wasn't like Suzanne. Aside from the fact that they didn't share the same attitudes, he could see why they mightn't get along. Jacynthe had little of Suzanne's kind of certainty and a different kind of energy, too, if it came to that. Suzanne got things done, it

was clear. Gilbert admired that. She would smack her hands together and say "*Paf*!" as though she were cleaning off chalk, and already he felt as though half a battle had been won. Suzanne was *formidable*! For that matter, they were both *formidable*! But as for formidable, that blockier word, that soldier, more serious 'formidable' of earnest forst and stony English seamen, he couldn't help wondering if it mightn't be Suzanne Legendre's province to be formidable.

At the end of the week, unable to work any more and suffering from his recurrent nostalgia, Gilbert took the St. Hubert street bus to the northern end of the city where his father now stayed. They were both alone now, he realized, and he wondered if that would put them on more equal footing. He travelled down familiar sounding streets, much changed since he had ridden them in his childhood in the last days of the cream-coloured cars that moved from Montreal North and Sault aux Récollets, along the refuse-strewn right of way to Ahuntsic Station and the start of Kelly Street. That was the street with the freight rails running up the middle and the forest of hybrid switchings where streetcar met train tracks — Kelly Street, with the wet sand left over from the winter, the warm surprising smell in the air, and the gangs of children walking home from school. Now it was called Henri Bourassa Boulevard — Henry Birds-ass Boulevard as his cousins had christened it in visceral protest over the change to French the year before they left for Winnipeg.

But Gilbert most remembered the trip in the opposite direction, from Ahuntsic Station south to Millen, on to the terminus at Crémazie where the trolley poles shot off a shower of blue sparks as they crossed lines and the conductors reached out from open back windows and guarded

them like long fishpoles in a gale. Then down St. Denis in a urinal-smelling cowbarn with its bell and great sheets of front window glass, right downtown, while the crowds pushed and jostled under the blue window signs — DEFENSE DE CRACHER — and each elderly lady eyed her opening on the yellow wicker seats. They'd been part of his father's life too, these decrepit streetcars (or so he'd been told), when the brown models were new and boys had hitched rides on cowcatchers and collected transfers from exotic corners of the city — Jolicoeur 94, Wellington 14 — and maybe dreamed of being motormen themselves, one hand on an accelerator and the other on a fat, brass-handled brake. Now as he rode the bus, Gilbert tried to recall some of the cityscape he used to pass once a week, but only the churches and the public bath seemed familiar, until he reached the 20's style duplexes of the north end, with the outer staircases winding up to the second floor: his uncle William's place (once his grandparents') on Sacré Coeur.

He was met at the door by his father, with a day's growth of beard on his face and that odd cowlick that shot up from his head on Saturdays when he didn't bother to take care of himself. He looked wan and distracted, as though he'd just gotten up from a cheerless nap and was a bit disoriented even in his own house.

"So, boy, what brings you out this way?"

"Oh, I just thought I'd see how you were getting along."

"Is that so? Well, none the worse. None the worse."

Gilbert nodded and smiled, and they sat together for a moment in the living room in among the overstuffed Edwardian furniture, deep green, plum purple, relics from the first World War.

"I was just reading here," Norm said, taking off his glasses, "before I dozed off, that is — what that blinking crew've done with their referendum question. Jesus H. Christ, you'd fair need a Ph.D to decipher that claptrap with their god given rights and their mandate to negotiate."

Norm thrust the stub end of his glasses at the newspaper and rattled it three times in a row.

"Bamboozle you! That's what they want!" He put the paper aside. "And that's what gets me. Always these underhanded tricks. Never direct. Out or in! That's the real question. Out or in? And if it's out, well, shake hands and it's been good doing business with you and that's that. None of this messing around fancypants yes-but and no-maybe till you're sick to your teeth."

Gilbert decided to let this one slide. He had only been half listening anyway as he looked about this living room that had once been his grandparents' and which still retained on curly-legged coffee tables and the top of an upright Lindsay piano bearing the date 1894 their harvest of memorabilia, of photos and family heirlooms. When he had been a boy and the family had visited at Christmastime, these rooms had seemed massive and magic, lighted and boisterous, filled with aunts and uncles, with cousins of all sizes, from Ottawa, from Three Rivers, and he and Petie Rollins and Billy MacDowell had sat under the dining room table with a bowl of chocolate-covered raisins and played poker until well past midnight. Now the rooms seemed shrunken and faded as they had once when at the age of nine he'd visited unexpectedly and seen them in a watery winter afternoon light stripped of the crowds of relatives and trays of cakes, and caught his grandparents in the middle of an argument.

"So I take it you haven't settled yet down at the office?" he said.

"Settled! Lord god, no.. They want their cost of living. They want their ten paid holidays and maybe two coffee breaks instead of one. *Two* coffee breaks, if you please. As though they weren't on one long one all day as it is. It's 'humane,' they say, and besides, Mervin Brothers are doing it. I said to Donoghue on the phone, I said to hell with Mervin Brothers. If Saul Mervin wants to play patsy to these pikers and featherbedders, to hell with them. Someone's got to stand up for decency this day and age."

"Have you heard anything from Mother?"

Norm had his stricken look when that subject came up, and all the pugnacious terrier dog in him disappeared in a trice. He fetched down a letter from the photos on top of the upright piano.

"Got this in the mail from her. That's all."

Gilbert read it and screwed up his face. It was a petition for divorce, the grounds just as she'd said — mental cruelty.

"Did she send anything else?"

"Nope," said Norm. "Just a little note saying she was very sorry but that her lawyer advised her this was the best thing. And, oh yes, asking me not to contest it."

"And are you going to?"

Norm looked down at his newspaper and wouldn't answer right away. Then, after a pause, he muttered: "I'll see what my lawyer says."

This was supposed to mean a good deal, Gilbert sensed, but he couldn't quite uncode it. Norm let another long silence pass between them.

"So you've got a lawyer, then?"

"Yup."

"What's his name?"

"Gold, I think. Jack Gold. Jewish fellow. He knows the ropes."

Another long silence. Then Gilbert played another card.

"You figure he knows what he's doing?"

Norm stared over at the wall.

"Oh, he knows what he's doing. Knows how to keep everything above board."

Above board. What could he possibly mean by above board? But it didn't take much to conclude that his father had been injured by Adele's imputations and was determined to clear himself of them.

"Your mother, now — she's not a well woman," Norm said offhandedly, still staring at the wall. "Not in control of herself."

Gilbert looked at him, then changed the subject.

"Listen, one of the reasons I came was to ask if you'd reconsider your decision on the building records. I don't think I need to tell you how important they are to me — to my work. And all I really need from them is one thorough look-through and an opportunity to photocopy any pertinent documents. Strictly historical research. I can't see how that could be compromising in any way."

Norm Rollins poked his glasses down his nose and peered out at his son. He was trying to be mild. Gilbert could see he was trying to be mild, even conciliatory.

"I don't think you know what you're asking for there, boy." He said this quietly and let it sink in for a moment. Then he said, "Those are *vipers* you're dealing with." Gilbert felt his father pleading with him

now, trying to get him to understand. "Vipers! Don't you see that?" He pointed to the newspaper. "They'll string you up if you give them an opening."

"Oh, for heaven's sake."

"They'll string you up, I say! They'll cut you and cut you till there's nothing left. You can't *afford* to get mixed up with them. Mark my words there, boy. Let them pass by the door. Pass on. Then you can breathe a little. Just as long as they don't interfere. I tell you they'll drive a business into the ground, put the kibosh on it, and it won't recover, fella. Once you let that rot in, my Lord, it's like —"

It took Norm a split second before he could bring himself to articulate his thoughts, and his voice grew hoarse as he began, but surely, he felt, this would clinch the matter.

"It's like the clap, man! Scars you. Works away at you. Undermines the brain, always undermining. That's what these scaliwags have in mind, boy. Let them pass, I say. You just can't risk having them around you. Not when you've got any kind of livelihood to protect."

Gilbert could see there wasn't much point in carrying on the conversation.

Part 2 — Spring: 1980

The Restoration

Chapter 11

As Gil Rollins drove down the Trans-Canada highway toward the West Island of Montreal, he was thinking about Suzanne Legendre. He hadn't heard from her for almost three weeks, had telephoned her on occasions without a reply, and had begun to wonder just how serious she'd really been in making him the offer about the film. Once or twice he also turned over in his mind her proposition about the Mercer-Granville files. Maybe she was right. Maybe it would be a simple enough thing to step in and get them, especially if she knew the people she said she did, whereupon he remembered the security service his father had called the first day they'd visited. Gilbert promptly dismissed the whole idea.

But it bothered him that the building stood there, a link to a past he valued, a layered, hybrid sort of past in its own way precious, and that people like his father wouldn't acknowledge it, wanted instead to disparage or suppress it. More than just the spirit of the past seemed at stake. Perhaps it was the spirit of graciousness and charity that occasionally invigourated it. He knew that for forty-seven years, from 1820 to Confederation, the *Couvent des Récollets* had been a Protestant church too, on loan to a congregation of Anglicans whose church had

burned to the ground in one of the city's successive conflagrations.

Gilbert bore right at the corner of 9th Street and Montée des Sources, ready for the turn before he remembered that his parents didn't live there any more. With the money she'd gotten from the sale of the house, Adele had bought another. Smaller, scruffier, northward near the ever flood-prone Rivière des Prairies, it had become a source of constant tension between herself and her daughter — not so much over the fact that she'd bought it or that it could in any way rival the two-storey split-level the de Geers now inhabited, but because Randy was always being called upon to fix it. Ice backed up the shingles and stained the living room walls as it melted in the spring. The furnace smelled. The bathroom tiles were marred by mould. The water pipes changed unpredictably from opera to percussion whenever the taps were opened, and firebrats dotted the dishes as they dried or the sinks once they'd drained. Displeased, Adele tended to blame Gilbert. Hadn't she asked him to inspect it? Mercifully, he'd been too far away for minor repair jobs. Pamela told Randy to put his foot down on that subject, but he didn't quite know how.

That was the price of *de facto* freedom (though Randy didn't see why he had to pay it.) Juridical freedom, court-approved freedom, now that was harder to come by. And old-school judge — Catholic, Adele was sure he was Catholic — had not only refused her petition for divorce, but had administered a lecture as well, a torment to her sixty-year old soul. Jack Gold had done his job. "I see no mental cruelty in being the steadfast father of three children or in diligent labour for forty-three years (since the age of 16, if I am to understand), in providing a house

and home and a decent life for his family, and rather than trying to compromise all this, madame, you should be thanking God that He has been kind enough to provide for you so generously as this. I've seen enough cases in my years to know that you are a fortunate woman."

"God, Randy, the bloody nerve of that chauvinist! I mean who did he think he *was*!" Pam sat back on her mother's couch while Randy changed little Emilia.

"It's certainly hard to believe," Randy said softly from his side of the room.

"In this day and age especially." Pamela turned a commiserating look to her mother. "You must have been so embarrassed."

"I certainly was."

Adele looked away, hurt even to remember.

"So much for women's liberation, that's all I can say, eh Randy? Can you imagine? Geez, that burns me up. I don't see why you can't just walk into a court and say, 'I don't want to live with this person any more' and that's that instead of being -- being accountable, that's the word I'm looking for, being accountable to an old *fart*, for heaven's sake. What *right* has he?"

"There's my tinker," gurgled Adele stretching out her arms and ignoring her daughter. "There's my little tinker, then. Yes 'ou are." She dandled little Emilia up and down. "Yes 'ou are, then. Give Nana a smile. Come on. Give Nana a smile. You don't understand any of this silly grown-up talk, do you. No-o, you don't, you tinker."

"Can't you appeal these old fools' decisions, Randy? I mean they

just don't *rule* on your life like that, do they?"

"Oh, I believe they do," said Randy.

"*God*!"

But Adele was treating little Emilia to a bit of dancing.

"Tee dum teedum tee tiddle-tee-dum," she said as she hoisted her up and down from her lap. "Teedum teedum tee tiddle-dee-dum and -- Wee-ee!" Down went little Emilia, with a trace of a smile, onto Adele's lap. "Teedum teedum tee tiddle-dee-dum and -- Wee-ee!" Down went little Emilia again, this time about to cry.

"Oh-h, was that too fast for you? A little bit too fast?"

"Mother, maybe you'd better put her in her basinette. She's probably been over-exerted."

"Oh."

Adele did as she was told, though it was clear she wasn't used to ceding place where babies were concerned. Businesslike, she changed her tone. "Randy, what are those things?" She pointed to some plastic contraptions screwed onto the sides of the basinette and overhanging Emilia's face.

"Oh, those are sensory stimulators, Mother."

"Sensory stimulators?"

Randy beamed. "Yes, Lieblein has suggested that babies make significant progress as to intelligence when stimulated in the early months of development."

"Oh, really?" said Gilbert. "Is that why there are all those colours?"

But little Emilia didn't like being put into the basinette after all, and started to cry again. Adele hesitated, then looked towards her

daughter.

"Oh-h, you're not going to leave her there, are you?"

Randy smiled. "It's all right, Mother. This should take care of it."

He placed a small cassette tape recorder beside the child, turned it on, and waited a moment. Then a curious wheezing and banging began, like a tin pot being struck under water. Randy and Pam leaned forward a little to study the effect of this on their child. Gilbert drew a little closer, too. More wheezings and bangings, and little Emilia seemed for a moment quietly stunned.

"You know, Randy, I swear she recognizes that."

"I know," said Randy in an undertone.

"Thursday night I turned it on and she gave me such a look, like it really soothed her. Poor thing, she *wanted* to go back; I could just tell."

"Go back *where*?" said Adele in exasperation.

"Sh!" ordered Pam. "You'll distract her."

"But *you're* talking. And I want to know what's going on."

Emilia was in full form by this time, but Randolph turned patiently to his mother-in-law to explain.

"This is a recording of the maternal heart-beat as the foetus hears it in the womb, Mother. Haliburton suggests improvement as to anxiety on audition and Pam's experience was tending to corroborate that."

"Oh, my heavens," marveled Adele. She started to study Emilia herself, but Randy's strategy now appeared on the verge of complete rout. He became a little perturbed.

"Should we turn it a bit louder?"

Pam nodded.

"Geez, Randy, this is the first time she hasn't *really* been interested. Do you think she could be bored already?"

Randy dismissed this.

"No, I don't think so, Pam."

"Well, I know I'd be bored listening to that for nine months," Adele piped in good-humouredly. "She's probably just as happy to hear something different."

"God, you can sound like Father sometimes," said Pam, immensely irritated.

Adele flinched. "Well, maybe she's just hungry."

However Pam wasn't to be assuaged.

"I fed her a couple of hours ago, Mother. She can't be *that* greedy."

"Perhaps," offered Randy, "she's undergone some alteration as to metabolic rate, Pam."

"Oh, fine! Fine! Since you people know so much, let's just see." Pam fetched her shawl from a chair, unhooked her bra, and tramped down the hall to the steps. Gilbert knew the two of them had firm convictions about breast feeding in public. Pam had first done it in the Surf and Turf after a family meal with Adele and Randy's parents, celebrating the birth. "They do it in Africa, Mother," Randy had said.

This time little Emilia refused to co-operate. No matter how often her squalling face was squared up with the breast, she'd turn writhing away and scream to the end of her breath.

"You see, Randy, I told you she wasn't interested. She probably has that allergy I was telling you about."

"What allergy?"

"Oh, Mother, I'll tell you another time." And she kept waving the nipple in the child's face like a matador with a balky bull.

"Here," said Randy at last. "I'll walk her."

But as he went to take the infant from his wife's arms, Pam quickly snatched her away.

"No you don't! She stays right here. I don't know what makes you think *you* can quiet her when everybody knows the child's instincts are directed towards her mother."

"But Pam," said Randy quietly, "You know it's been suggested that that's not really relevant."

"Well, I think it *is*, Randy. I mean I'm the one who carried her around in my stomach for nine months. And I'm the one who has breasts!"

Randy stepped backwards a little. For a moment he was silenced. Then he finally murmured, "Yes, of course, I agree with you, Pam, but remember. As to the original conception..."

He went slowly out and sat down in the living room.

Gilbert heard from Suzanne on one of those mid-week pre-Referendum nights when the news was full of the box-score of who had lined up on the NO side, who on the YES, when rumours were rife about converts and adherents on every front from the world of the arts to the local sports celebrities. There was even talk, dismissed by *indépendantistes*, about the mayor and members of the executive committee declaring *en masse* for the federal side.

For Gilbert it had been a slothful time. He hadn't put pen to paper for a week, though he was supposed to be working on a chapter on

the great fire of 1852. Most mornings he'd spent clambering through the newspapers, the afternoons beating his brains over what he'd heard on the open-line radio shows. He was even counting front-end licence plates when he drove: three blue fleurs de lys on white background, definite YES supporter; straight red maple leaf, certain NO. Likely YES supporters, *Je roule en français*, *Québec Armé*, *Québec* love; likely NO, fleur de lys shaking hands with a maple leaf, Canadian coat of arms. Abstentions, *J'aime ma femme*. By these standards it was a dead heat, though he had to take into account the area he was in. Further east, who could tell?

"*Allô, Gilbert?*"

Suzanne's voice sounded almost strident against a background of laughter and chatter. It was ten thirty at night.

"Listen, I've got to see you. I'm in a restaurant on Prince Arthur."

Gilbert looked hastily around at the mess of his bed, the pile of unwashed dishes beside the sink.

"Which one?"

She gave him the address.

When he caught sight of her she was seated alone, blowing smoke toward the ceiling with her usual air of perpetual impatience. She'd dyed her hair a different shade of blond and wore — he noticed for the first time — an expensive pair of suede boots.

"Gilbert!"

A flash of relief crossed her face. "Come on, I don't want to talk in here." She took him by the arm and led him out into the street.

"Let me tell you what's happened. I think your building is about to be sold."

"Which?"

"Which. Mercer-Granville, of course. It's going to be sold."

"To whom?"

"To a hotel developer. He's going to demolish it, leave it as a parking lot for a year or two, then put up a new hotel close to Vieux Montréal in time for the completion of the convention center."

"How do you know this?"

"How do I know this. I have contacts, that's all. I can't tell you who. But it's reliable information. I'm certain of that."

Gilbert expressed a short, sharp breath through his nose. For a moment they walked along in silence. Then he said, "So that's it. The developer moves in and down she goes."

Suzanne seemed immediately offended by this.

"What do you mean, 'That's it?' It's not as if you can't do something about it? I don't know what's the matter with you Anglophones — you take everything that's given to you like that. *Mon dieu, c'est é-coeur-ant, Gilbert. Faut pas accepter ça!* You know where those papers are. We get copies of them and get that place declared under the law as fast as we can. Why not?"

"Because I'm not about to walk away with building records that don't belong to me, that's why not."

"Belong to you. Belong to me. Right now I don't give a damn about that stuff because that building should belong to everybody, no? I say so — And you agree with me. So let's go and make legal what everybody knows should be legal."

"Oh, Suzanne, it's not so simple as that — "

"It *is* Gilbert. It's so simple I have to laugh. We go on a Sunday night when there's no picketing and the rent-a-cops are at home. We go with somebody who knows the whole building. My god, he even knows the combination to the safe! We get in. We walk out. We copy the documents, send the originals back in the mail, if that makes you feel better — and then *paf! Fini ton développeur!*"

"And just how do you propose to get in so easily, Suzanne? You seem to think they've never heard of locks? Or that your friends in the union have private keys?"

"*Oph*, Gilbert. You have such a fixation with front doors. A front-door mind, that's your problem. If you can't get through the door, you come through the window. You've never heard of that? I told you I could get you in. At least two guys who work there know how to get in through the back. It's *easy*. They worked there long enough to know. And you're the one who knows what papers we're talking about. Twenty minutes — that's what it takes for what we need. And remember, if you don't do it, it's good-bye to that building, because we have to get that place classified *before* the developer signs the papers and applies for a permit to demolish. After the fact, it doesn't work. I checked."

Gilbert fell silent for a moment.

"Who are those guys who know their way around so well?" he finally asked.

Suzanne's face brightened.

"*Mais enfin, bravo, Gilbert! Oui!* Bruno Carrier, that's one. Jean-Guy Pouliot, that's another. I can introduce you."

Gilbert nodded silently. In his own mind, all that silent nodding

meant was that he'd agreed to meet them, not that he'd committed himself to anything further. But he could sense that Suzanne chose to look at this altogether differently, and he did nothing to correct her.

"I'll bring you to a union meeting Friday night," she said, relieved and excited. "You'll see, Gilbert, what I've been telling you. You'll see!"

She stopped abruptly and having gotten what she wanted edged a bit behind him.

"Look, I've got to see somebody tonight for sure, okay? I'll call you."

She stepped out into the street and ran across.

"Taxi!" she yelled. "Taxi!"

There was no screeching of tires, but Gilbert could see the hood of the car dive suddenly forward, Suzanne reach for the door handle with hardly a skip of a beat.

"*Eh, Gilbert!*" she called out laughingly. "*Bonsoir!*" She touched her index finger to her thumb as a sign of victory.

The Restoration

Chapter 12

Wednesday of that week, Gilbert got a call from Matthew Oates. He was in Montreal for a few days before a scheduled Referendum blitz of L'Estrie, La Beauce, and Rimouski in the company of the minister. Matthew was pressed for time. Gilbert was struck by the fact that both he and Suzanne seemed beset by the same nervousness self-importance.

"I hardly have a moment, Gil, but I just wanted -- Oh, by the way, do relay a message for me. Tell Jacynthe I tried to get a hold of her at least three times, but she was never there. I'll try again, but in case I don't succeed, I've got two appearances to put in the can in the next couple of days, if you can believe it, one on Pierre Proulx's show tomorrow afternoon. Listen, Gil, I do have some good news for you, and that's really why I'm calling. The application has been received, and the minister has put his special tag on it. You're a shoo-in for the funds, as you might have guessed. Ten thousand right off the top with government research at your disposal. I hope that helps."

Gilbert waited a moment before he replied.

"What can I say, Matthew? Of course it helps."

"Good! Then that's settled. Needless to say, the minister is

especially interested in the Mercer-Granville affair, Gil. I've filled him in on your speculations, and he's read the abstract you've provided very keenly indeed. I think it's fair to say that's the element of your research that most decided matters in your favour. He requested me specifically to ask if you'd come across anything more concrete with respect to plans or documents."

"Nothing yet. But there's a rumour that the building is about to be sold and demolished. You hadn't heard that?"

Matthew paused before answering.

"No, I hadn't heard that. I hadn't at all. Do you know who's involved?"

"Some developer. He wants to put up a hotel. Suzanne Legendre told me the other day."

"Is that so? I must speak to her. Do you happen to know the name of the outfit?"

"No, I'm afraid not."

"I must tell the minister this directly. If only we had something concrete... You see the importance of that. You're quite sure you have nothing?"

"Believe me, I wish I had, Matthew."

"Of course, of course. Look, I must go. I'm meeting two splendid priests from Nicaragua. They're here as quasi-ambassadors for the Sandinistas. Remarkable chaps. But I will be in touch. As I say, the minister is especially keen about this dossier. I'm sure we'll see it through. As a matter of fact, he's alluded to it twice now in recent speaking engagements. He sees it as a small version of what it is we're

attempting to do. *Un grand projet de restauration*. His phrase. Rather striking I felt. I thought that might interest you."

As he hung up the phone, Gilbert could hardly help wincing. Ten thousand dollars was fine, though the prospect of government research assistance filled him with little more than caution. But attaching that phrase — and the spirit behind it — to the independence movement jarred him, made him wonder. People saw as they wished; it was clear, and they acted on their own insights just as Matthew did himself — even someone like his brother-in-law who imagined he could rehabilitate souls if only he were privy to enough of their shabby secrets. Like a giant ferris wheel, the image of Randolph's sensory stimulator rotated before his eyes.

And what of his own futile culture ideals lifted straight from Matthew Arnold — or was it Henry James? Did they not constitute *un grand projet de restauration* too? Everybody from Adam had one, it seemed. Some survived; others didn't, though for all that he was hardly prepared to let Matthew's prevail. Suzanne Legendre's words began to assume another dimension in his mind. If he didn't do it, it was good-bye to the building, maybe to more than that, a fact of history perhaps, a cultural blending. He reminded himself once again that the *Couvent des Récollets* had been for almost half a century a protestant church too. Why, if his facts were straight, they'd even added a whole wing to the South end of the building!

As for Matthew and his *ministre*, they could go to hell. So could Randy for that matter. They all flocked together as far as Gilbert was concerned, all ministering to the common squawking about the self or the collectivity, virtually interchangeable anyway, ideas they'd hatched

like a nestful of tumultuous birds. "Self! Self!" came the call, and there was Randy stuffing a worm down a fuzzy neck. "Self! Self!" came the national cry, and there were Matthew and his *ministre*, their beaks half-way down their hatchlings' throats, nestling worms as close to their charges' stomachs as they could. People like Adele came trailing it in sacks — Self, like a bag of mussels straight from the shore, and the accredited, Randy, Matthew's *ministre* would prod them here and there, pry them open, then utter their specious pronouncements: Self, the supreme vindication, either personal or tribal, the larger heritage of things, always restrictive and somehow irreducible, the facts, the artifacts of life largely ignored, neglected, dismissed. In the world of Self everything was possible, nothing ever really achieved.

The Restoration

Chapter 13

The following evening of that mild, late April week, as Gilbert sat at the immense disorder of his desk, the confusion of notes and articles and photographs, he wondered what it was that had allowed him to agree to Suzanne Legendre's proposal. She was a bit of a bully, he knew, and he might have found it hard to stand up to her in any event. "The mental gun," Jacynthe Danielle had said. It had been pointed at him — and with no small effect. Yet he also knew he was beginning to enjoy the thought of playing activist for Suzanne, reluctant as he might have been at first, especially since the preservation of the building, should it ever occur, fell more in line with his way of thinking than with hers. To preserve a building with the shades and nuances of the *Couvent des Récollets*, to do it with the help of a group of committed péquistes appealed both to his sense of irony and to his growing passion for public declaration. After all, was Matthew the only one with a right to speak on these matters?

His father he dismissed. To have just such a building classified would serve as a statement, subtle as it might be, both against Norm's narrowness and against Matthew's. Subtlety was what he wanted anyway!

Three cheers for subtlety — antidote to crude simplifications! Besides, what harm would it do, apart from denying Mercer-Granville quick profits from the sale of the land? The building would be there. The business would at least run if it didn't flourish. The jobs would be secure. The more he thought about the matter, the more certain he became, and, filled with a kind of enthusiasm, he pushed himself away from the desk and began pacing nervously up and down the room. "Active history, not passive history!" he would repeat to himself, sending his fist into the palm of his hand as though striking something dead with the blow. "Active history, not passive history!" and he walked himself into an evening's worth of conviction and more. He was to meet Suzanne that Friday at seven in a place in Verdun. When the thought of mentioning all this to Jacynthe Danielle arose, he promptly put it out of his mind.

He was fifteen minutes late that Friday evening. Eighty-five or ninety members of the *Confédération des syndicats nationaux* (formerly *des syndicats catholiques*) sat in the church basement in Verdun listening to Father Mario Quenneville inform them that in foreign lands about the globe there suffered many more misfortunate than they. At the close of his brief address, he asked the assembly to approve a contribution of one thousand dollars to the Managua relief fund. The motion passed by a show of hands.

Short and stockily built, his bushy gray-haired brush-cut as correct as his speech, Father Quenneville seemed to come by his compassion honestly. With the simplicity of an older, rural Quebec, he seemed to Gilbert, standing at the back of the hall, like a phantom out of a dead time. He was dressed in his priestly robes with the silver cross on his

breast, and he was flanked on either side of the microphone by the blue-jeaned members of the union executive, the president and the vice-president. Yet even the two younger men, thirtyish, raised on a little hash and the politics of the left, accorded their priest an almost reflex deference. On the way in Gilbert had noticed that the old Catholic pamphlets on, say, the Passion, featuring the mournful and mild-eyed Hero, no longer dotted the plain tables of the vestibule. They'd been replaced by day-care application forms. The church basement was now *le centre communautaire Ste.-Cunégonde*.

As Father Quenneville took his seat, Gilbert pushed carefully toward the front through small knots of people gathered in the aisles. Midway, he was blocked by a heavy-set woman in her forties who'd gotten herself dressed up in a rabbit costume: black leotards, pom-pom at the rear, make-up, large floppy ears. There was no mistake. It was a rabbit costume, and when he looked twice to be sure, she seemed to glower right back at him. Averting his eyes, he carried on to the front where he noticed a glint of Suzanne's blond hair, excused himself to the right and left as he edged between the seats, then delivered an apologetic smile in her direction as he sat down. Rabbit notwithstanding, it felt as though he'd arrived late for church — only here people smoked furiously and applauded when the priest had finished. However, when Father Quenneville rose again to offer a small prayer for a speedy settlement, even the applause was cut short. Father Quenneville spoke briefly of charity and fraternal love.

"It's going to be hot tonight!" Suzanne whispered in Gilbert's ear as the prayer drew to a close.

"Why?"

"A bunch wants to go back. One of them is going to resign from the union."

"Oh dear."

They fell silent as the priest concluded, and they stayed that way through a lengthy report entitled '*L'aide Confederale.*' The vice-president returned to the stage. Suzanne waved her hand until he caught her eye, motioned to the top of Gilbert's head, then pointed outside to the hallway.

"*Viens t'en,*" she said, rising.

Hardly had she made a move when the commotion she'd predicted began. A wispy-haired youth rose to a microphone at the front of the hall to address the assembly. As soon as he did, the rabbit lady rushed forward from the rear.

"*Laisse-le parler!*" came a shout.

"*Vendu!*" she screamed back. There was a tussle for the mike as the executive rose in unison from their seats.

"*A l'ordre, s'il vous plaît,*" called the chairman. "*Janine, s'il te plaît.*"

But the rabbit lady had wrestled the microphone away from her prey and by dint of sheer volume had cowed the executive back into their seats.

"*N'avez-vous pas honte, vous tous! Vous n'avez pas honte? Istie! Pah!*" She turned and spat openly on the floor in front of the wispy-haired youth. "You mother should take you apart again. She put you together, she should be *ashamed!* You want to go back in and be a scab? Pah!" She spat again. "*Ça, c'est pour les scabs!*"

"Janine, calme-toi."

"Ferme ta gueule, Guy Panet, tu ne connais rien là-dedans."

She turned the microphone to address the crowd.

"Everybody knows why I wear this costume. *Et c'est pas pour Playboy que je l'fais, ça c'est sûr.* It's to show these little boys when they're made of candy wrappers what the *hell* they turn into when they want to give up. *Ouais. Il veut nous donner sa démission, on me dit? Plus d'bataille. Pour lui c'est fini y m'semble. Bon! Il veut devenir un lapin, c'est tout!"*

There was laughter and some applause.

"Comme moi, hein? Câlisse? Ta mère t'a jamais dit ça, là? Lâche pas, crisse! Lâche pas!"

Ashen, pale, the young man stood his ground, nodding his head sullenly to her abuse. Finally, without the benefit of the mike, he appealed to the chair.

"C'est pas une démocratie icitte?" he shouted.

The chairman rose again to his feet.

"Janine, assieds-toi."

But this was all the goad she needed. The rabbit lady had grown apoplectic.

"C'est pas une démocratie pour les lapins, 'stie! C'est une démocratie pour ceux qui comprennent la solidarité." She spat out the syllables. *"La so-li-da-ri-té! Comprends-tu, toi?"*

"Janine, c'est assez."

"And you," she said, turning again to the front of the room, "You have time for scabs? *Sont des pourris! Pha! Il est si jeune et il sent*

si mauvais. You stink! You listen to him you smell the stink of a scab. *Y a pas de couilles! C'est un défaitisse. O, c'est épouvantable. Je te jure!"*

She let go of the mike and there was a spontaneous burst of applause from a cross-section of the hall. The tirade had had the desired effect. Without saying more, the young man walked back to his seat and made a motion to sit down. Then he grabbed his coat savagely from the back of the seat, got up, and left the hall with two of his friends.

"*Bon débarras!*" yelled the rabbit lady after them. "*Bon débarras! On n'a pas besoin des scabs d'abord. Pas besoin de ces gens qui nous disent toujours Non, câlisse! On a de la fièrté, nous autres. Comprends-tu?*"

The loud-speakers picked up the shrillness of her voice and amplified it so that it seemed the tearing of her vocal chords as she yelled "*Comprends-tu?*" ought to have ripped the speakercloth up front as well. Her final outburst produced an even larger volley of applause. The chairman stood on his feet, flatly intoning, "*Merci Janine. Merci Janine,*" as though by itself this would restore order. When the applause subsided, Gilbert and Suzanne made their way to the adjoining hallway. There beside the smoke-filled hall Suzanne introduced him to Bruno Carrier, union vice-president.

"Is it always like this?" Gilbert asked him, cocking his head back toward the meeting.

Carrier looked at him and laughed.

"Sometimes," he said. He seemed a little proud of what had happened. Gilbert got the impression Carrier found the question naive.

But he soon realized that Suzanne had laid the groundwork for this meeting very well. Carrier was quite aware of what was at stake. If Mercer-Granville were sold, his members' jobs were in jeopardy. Classified, the building might still retain its former uses. Carrier was pessimistic enough both about the firm's intentions and the chances of a settlement that he seemed ready to do whatever was needed. He knew the way in. His friend Pouliot knew the safe. Things would work out.

Carrier and his friend, coming downtown from the north, would pick Gilbert up in a blue Honda Civic at the central bus terminal Sunday evening at 8:15. They would carry on from there. Gilbert repeated the information to make sure he'd gotten it right.

"You coming back for the rest of the meeting?"

Gilbert looked at Suzanne.

"No. No, I don't think so," he said.

Carrier waved and clapped him lightly on the shoulder as he turned to go. Then for a moment Gilbert and Suzanne stood silently together. For no reason, Gilbert just smiled and shrugged.

The Restoration

Chapter 14

That week-end was a nerve-wracking one for Gilbert Rollins. He spent two days pacing up and down his room or turning on his tiny television to catch the highlights of the Referendum debates that had begun the previous week. Analysts on *Radio-Québec* were in the midst of a long dissection of the premier's opening address and Matthew's *ministre* was there too, live, like a second-rate family counsellor, speaking with his customary unction and the ghoulish serenity he had affected over the years. His subject was the growth and maturity of nations and the collective will to self-determination. For a moment he looked carefully into the camera and spoke of his own 'psychic progression' in boyhood. The moderator had seemed genuinely touched.

All weekend long Gilbert kept his eye on the clock. He drank too many cups of coffee, picked up a journal on recent trends in architecture and just as often laid it down. Whenever he read, the paragraphs would fly out of his head, to be replaced by the bearded image of Bruno Carrier, the rabbit lady's baleful glare, Suzanne Legendre, and he'd find himself pacing up and down again, wondering what he'd got himself into. Was it just arrogance on his part? Some silly test of himself in

revenge against books and papers and articles? What if they got caught? But he persuaded himself he hadn't gotten involved for selfish motives. The building did count for something objectively, historically. He determined to focus on that. And they wouldn't be caught. He was sure Carrier and his friend knew what they were about. It would be just as Suzanne had said.

That Sunday evening, he left his apartment to eat before he was really hungry, wandered about the streets in the neighbourhood, then went back home. It was 7:15 when he finally arrived at the bus terminal — far too early, but from the coffeeshop in the building he was able to keep an eye on the concourse, car after car, almost mesmerizing. Beside him, behind him passed a parade of life-wearied people, gray as Montreal buildings under a gray winter sky, life-saddened people who worked in offices or taught school or cleaned hospitals and who lived in duplexes in Montreal North and went occasionally to the bring-your-own-wine restaurants on Duluth Street. In winter time they dreamt of going to the beaches, but usually they bought the *Journal de Montréal* and drank a little coffee from crazed white porcelain mugs and ground their cigarettes on the floor under the red naugahyde counter stools before boarding the buses to visit their relatives in Drummondville or North Bay. They were the people all the fuss was about — the *mêlange* of the city, English, French, Italian. If you asked them what they thought of old buildings, they would probably say they were nice. It occurred to Gilbert they would probably say the same about bright new highrises.

At 8:10 Bruno Carrier and Guy Pouliot appeared, in a blue Honda Civic, rusting along the fenders and doors, an insignia, now faded, for

the *Parti Québecois* on the front windshield. Gilbert left the coffee-shop, opened the back door, and got in. Carrier nodded, introduced him to his friend. They smiled, mumbled something. Then Carrier pulled into the traffic on Boulevard de Maisonneuve. Hatless, red-mustached, Pouliot half looked back and asked Gilbert what he thought of the chances of the New York Islanders. Then he lit up a cigarette.

On the back window of the car, Gilbert noticed the ubiquitous OUI sign, on the seat a mess of papers and old jogging shoes, some Coke bottles, a red hunting jacket. Absurd as it was, he'd have found himself reassured by a tidier car, something that didn't look as though it came straight out of the backyard garages of Parthenais Street, where the terminal wrecks had their engines hoisted in dark wooden garages, their cylinders bored and re-bored, their rusted body-holes packed smooth with filler, primed but never painted. Was it their fault that the Japanese had cheapened up on metal in 1973 or that Mercer-Granville had paid them substandard wages for years, then locked them out? And yet, travelling quietly in the back seat toward what all along he couldn't help thinking of as his first felony, against his own better judgment Gilbert called to mind that battered Chrysler of another time, ex-taxi driver Jacques Lanctot at the wheel, another with the hostage in the rear, a phalanx of motorcycles speeding them toward Man and his World, from there to Dorval, finally Cuba.

Gilbert smiled, shook his head at himself, and looked out the window. In the twilight, the giant blue OUI banners draped over the balconies fixed every building's place in the public quarrel. At the corner of St. Denis and de Maisonneuve they stopped, the campus of the *Université du Québec* whose professors were *indépendentistes* and lived in restored

townhouses in St. Louis Square — or federalist, like Jacynthe, and lived in restored condominiums in Old Montreal. It was strange how often he had to remind himself to be fair. Politics. Like the salt they spread on the roads, he'd heard Jacynthe say, and he wondered what she would think if she could see what he'd gotten himself involved with.

Pouliot opened his window to let in some of the mild April air. To the right past the blackened remnant of a snowpile rose the spire of the old church of St. Jacques, the vestigial spire preserved and incorporated into the university buildings — pride of the new Quebec. When the traffic light changed they continued, south on St. Urbain, past the triple towers of the provincial administrative headquarters, Complexe Desjardins. Opposite, in this, the battleground to tit for tat, stood the site of the future federal counterpart, Place Guy Favreau, still a huge hole in the ground, grave-yard for half of Chinatown, the putative *tombeau du fédéralisme* that loomed so large in nationalist expectations. Further south again by St. Antoine Street (née Craig), past the abandoned building of *The Montreal Star*, defunct, the spectacular presses in the windows silent, casualty of a pervasive obduracy and a narrowing clientele.

"You gonna know those papers when we get them?"

It was Pouliot.

"Oh, yes," said Gilbert. "As long as we get the safe open."

"Don't worry about that," laughed Pouliot. "That's the easy part."

Place d'Armes — the old quarter. A few blocks to the east, even in early spring, the taverns would be full and people would be walking, chatting. To the west, where the Honda was pointed, the narrow streets

would be deserted; the buildings would be gray-blue under the streetlights and for the most part darkened inside. The night would be still and strangely noiseless at the heart of the city, and at the cobbled street corners, when the chunk of the wheels stopped, the click of the traffic lights could be heard changing from orange to red to green.

"*Câlisse, y a pas beaucoup de monde, hein?*" said Carrier as heartily as he could. They were about the only words Gilbert had heard him utter since he's gotten in the back seat.

"*Tant mieux. Pas besoin d'se presser. On aura tout le temps qu'y faut.*" He turned his head back to Gilbert. "Hey, we're gonna park in the back lane, there, okay? Then we go in through the door in the place I know. So you just stick close to us, everything's gonna be fine."

Carrier parked about 50 yards from the rear of the building in a shipping lane that ran parallel to la rue des Récollets. They got out and walked slowly. Gilbert knew the lane well enough to recognize the narrow loading dock of the company, and he half expected Pouliot and Carrier to stop in front of it, but they walked by.

"*Tu connais le théâtre?*" Pouliot asked in a whisper.

"Pardon?"

Gilbert hadn't been listening.

"You know the theatre?" Pouliot asked again.

"The theatre?"

"Wait, you gonna see."

Ten yards down from the loading dock with its metal doors and alarm system, in what seemed another building altogether, stood a plain wooden door with a narrow embrasure beside it, covered by a wire mesh. Carrier

poked his fingers behind the grating and pulled out a grimy key.

"Three years ago I put that there," he said with a grin. "You know whose idea that was?"

Gilbert looked blank.

"Your father! Watch your step, okay?"

In the bluish light of a safety lamp shining in a far corner, Gilbert understood what Pouliot had meant. The building they had entered was indeed an old theater. They'd come in directly on the stage. To the right and left were a number of packing crates along with some large rolls of paper. The cluttered stage was attached to the ground floor seating area by means of an inclined plane constructed from plywood. Some of the seats to the sides had never been removed. On many the black leather cushioning had been torn or had collapsed in strange angles toward the floor. An entire mezzanine of ruined black leather seats looked down on them from overhead.

"*Viens t'en*," said Carrier.

He and Pouliot led the way up some side steps to the mezzanine. The tongue and groove flooring behind the seats was gapped and skewed; Gilbert stumbled and briefly lost his balance, and his catch at an arm of one of the seats left his fingers covered with a gritty, blackening dust.

"*Attention, là*," said Pouliot, looking back.

A door at the top corner led to another narrow stairway, dark beyond the safety light. For a moment Carrier stopped, listened, then proceeded down. Gilbert felt for the banister. He started to take the flight of steps one at a time when Pouliot switched on a flashlight.

"*C'est par icitte?*"

"*Oui, oui.*" Carrier urged them both along in a hoarse whisper. "*Pas d'problème!*"

Down two flights, through some corridors Gilbert hardly recognized, then finally into the main office area, past the freight elevator to the basement with its sliding brass grating, past his father's office with the typewriter neatly covered, past Mayberry's, then along the corridor to the right, the room with the roller caster safe. Pouliot shone his light quickly round the room, then brought it to rest on the door of the safe.

"*C'est bien celle-là?*"

Gilbert nodded. Pouliot crouched before it and effortlessly opened the door. Then he motioned Gilbert to check the contents. The thick binder was right at the top where Mayberry had left it now more than three months earlier. Gilbert pulled it out and set it on the table. Under the flashlight, he riffled through the top quarter of the papers, casually opening the binder at the correspondence between the company and Lucien Bolduc.

"*Tu vois ça?*" he was about to say, when from the basement of the building they heard the electric noise of the freight elevator kicking in. Gilbert looked up in consternation.

"*Crisse!*" muttered Carrier. He went back out into the hall and immediately returned.

"Come on. Someone's here."

"But I don't know what pages we need."

"*Prends-le, maudit!*"

Pouliot grabbed the whole binder from under Gilbert's hand and made

for the door. For a split second Gilbert froze. He could hear the faint whine of the elevator motor. Then he heard it kick out, the click of the sliding brass curtain. Now he was through the doorway and down the corridor, following them. Right? Left? They'd taken a different route. Blindly, he raced down a corridor towards a door. But he knew as soon as he opened it that he'd made a mistake. A large desk confronted him, kitty-corner to one side, on the other a sofa, some coffee tables. "Jesus, jesus!" Behind him he heard the strange four-footed clicking sound of paws over waxed floor-tiles, a low growling.

"Enwaie, Rex!"

Gilbert jumped behind the desk and hoisted the office chair in front of his body. The dog stood before him, its eyes glinting in the half light of the streetlamp shining through the window, its slavering lower gum trembling near the teeth. A stiff leather guide handle that lay back along its body bounced as it snarled. Then the dog resumed a furious barking. Paws forward, the whole body seemed to empty itself, bark after bark.

"Pas de bêtises avec ton arme, là!" he heard a voice call out from the other side of the wall. *"Ce chien là, il est vite."*

"I have no gun," Gilbert replied in English.

But the man acted as though he hadn't heard.

"Si tu tentes de sacrer ton camp, le chien te poignera. C'est sûr! Quand je lui dis le mot, il attaque."

"Call him off. I won't go anywhere."

He tried to sound calm, measured. He tried to retain in the tone of his voice as much dignity as the circumstances allowed.

"*Je peux expliquer*," he said after a moment's silence.

"*Donne tes explications à la police.*"

They arrived within minutes, two uniformed officers, one — amazingly — English, Sgt. McMann, Gilbert read on the badge, the other Italian, Di Giovanni. Gilbert went quietly. They had asked him only for his wallet and identification, the sergeant spending a few minutes interviewing the security guard who had apprehended him. Lights flashing, the blue and white police cruiser waited outside the front door. Another pulled up. Gilbert noted the giant number on the side, 23-2. He also noticed that both cars had blackwall tires, and he wondered, for no reason, why all the police cars in Montreal had blackwall tires. When he was on his way, being driven down Notre Dame, the only noise the almost incomprehensible crackling of the police radio at the front, it occurred to him how spacious it was there in the back seat, really, how basic and spartan and clean.. He lay his hand along the blue-patterned vinyl seating. It was slightly ribbed. It felt cool and clean under his fingers.

The Restoration

Chapter 15

At the front desk of police station 33 they took his name, address, and occupation. Gilbert put down 'researcher.' After they confiscated what was in his pockets and listed each item on a pale green form, there at the back, in amongst the ranks of blonde-wood desks and capless, shirt-sleeved officers, sergeant McMann asked him what he'd been doing at the Mercer Granville building that night.

Gilbert was prepared for this. He knew what he was going to say. It was simply a question of keeping his voice level, his gaze direct.

"I know this may be difficult for you to accept," he began, "but I did have something of a legitimate reason for being there."

"Oh?"

McMann looked up at him with a skeptical smile. Gilbert could feel his fingers tighten slightly on the arm of the chair. He noticed his heart was pounding far more than he would have liked. He tried to breathe more slowly.

"Yes. I happen to be doing some historical research on the area, and I need to examine the building records."

Sergeant McMann made a few notes on a pad in front of him, then

looked up at Gilbert again.

"So you are a researcher?"

"Yes. I'm doing a — a book on the subject."

"Ah. And you needed it to be dark to do this research?"

"Pardon me?"

"You always do your research in the dark of the night like this?"

Gilbert looked down at the floor. After a moment he continued.

"Listen, if you want confirmation of this, please call Norman Rollins. He's the Secretary-Treasurer of the company. He's also my father. I'm sure he'll be happy to corroborate what I've been telling you."

Sergeant McMann made another note on his pad.

"Where can he be reached, your father?"

Gilbert gave him the number. Still McMann made no immediate motion to go to the telephone.

"And you were alone in the building tonight?"

Gilbert hesitated a moment. It occurred to him that perhaps no one had realized that he'd been accompanied. If he left them to think that? For an instant he determined he would risk no such subterfuge. Then, suddenly, he changed his mind.

"Yes," he said.

"Yes?"

"I was alone."

The sergeant looked at him narrowly.

"And you always run from the people who are in charge of the security of the building?"

Gilbert looked suddenly blank.

"I — I was taken aback. Under the circumstances..."

The sergeant waited for him to continue, and when Gilbert didn't, he said, "Mm" and wrote again on his pad. Then he rose from his desk and disappeared behind a glassed-off partition. When he reappeared, it was to tell him there were some coffee machines at the end of the room.

Gilbert caught sight of his father's fedora around ten-twenty that night. Though it was a mild evening, Norm was wearing both his hat and a pair of thin black rubber winter boots with zippers. Norm liked to be prepared. He also looked tired, but when he shook hands with Sergeant McMann his eyes brightened with the genial warmth he usually reserved for people in positions of authority — policemen, ministers, town councilmen. Maybe he feels it disarms them, Gilbert thought. Maybe it reassures them he's part of the team. For his son, that is what Norm's smile and handshake tried to say to Sergeant McMann that mild spring evening, just as his scarf and his fedora and his pair of thin black rubber boots zipped up to the very top said that Norm Rollins was a careful man, even a punctilious man, who knew that life needed order and regimen and habit in order to preserve itself, especially in such a climate of unpredictability as they all shared.

"Norm Rollins," he announced. "What's this I hear the lad's been up to?"

Gilbert had readied himself for this humiliation. Had his father really not been told? What did bloody policemen say over the phone anyway?

"We found your son in the building tonight. Your security service

overheard him and ..." The sergeant shrugged and gestured with his hands in Gilbert's direction.

"Lord Jesus," said Norm. He hardly knew what else to say. He looked from his son over to the sergeant and back to his son again.

The sergeant said, "If you want to take responsibility for that... I don't know. We found the safe open. You can check on that."

"Jesus, Jesus, fella. Was it *so* bloody important? Who let you in there?"

Gilbert pursed his lips and sat doggedly silent.

"Your son let me understand that he was authorized to enter the premises to conduct research on building records. Is that so?"

"Well, I don't know about that. I don't know about 'authorized.'"

"You mean your son had no permission to be on the premises?"

"Well, I won't say *that*."

Norm reflected for a moment. Exasperated, he turned back to his son.

"Jesus, fella, you could at least have let us know, couldn't you?"

Gilbert felt suddenly relieved. For an instant, all three were silent. Then the sergeant spoke again.

"If you say your son was authorized in the building, then that's the end of the problem for our part. You take the responsibility and..."

Once again the sergeant shrugged.

"Well, 'authorized' might be stretching things a bit, but you put it up to my name. N.L. Rollins." Norm half expected the sergeant to have had pen in hand. "N.L. Rollins. I'm the Secretary-Treasurer."

But the sergeant took no notice.

"Next time," he interjected looking at Gilbert, "You could spare

yourself some trouble and make sure everything is clear before you go into a building like that late at night."

Gilbert nodded his head. "Of course," he said.

When they settled into Norm's car, his father turned to him and left the keys dangling in the ignition.

"For the love of Mike, guy, can you tell me what in blazes possessed you to do a thing like that?"

"I think you already know what I had in mind."

"Like Christ I do! You want to get yourself a criminal record? Is that it? What's *in* it for you, fella? Can you tell me that?"

"Nothing's 'in it' for me. Nothing. I just happen to know that —" He caught himself. "I just have a thesis to write, that's all."

His father turned on the ignition, then paused over the wheel.

"Who let you in the place anyway?"

"Friends of mine."

"Friends of yours!" Norm shook his head. "Is that the bloody company you're keeping? How in hell's name did you get the safe open? Can you tell me that?"

Gilbert thought a moment before answering.

"I had help," he said simply.

"You had help," Norm repeated. "Who the hell are these friends? Professional thieves?"

"Let's just leave it at that, okay? I can't tell you who they are. And since you're bound to discover it anyway, let me just tell you that the building records are missing. I have an idea where they are and I'll do my best to get them back, but right now they're missing."

Norm wasn't sure he'd quite understood what he'd been told.

"Which building records?" he said.

"The building records in the black binder."

"Those building records? The ones Mayberry let you have?"

Gilbert nodded and gritted his teeth.

"Jesus H. Christ, man, I told you that stuff was sensitive! Where the hell is it?"

"I don't know."

"What do you mean you don't know? How could you get it back if you have no idea where the damned stuff is?"

"I mean I'm not sure. I'll have to find out."

"You'll have to find out, will you? Well, doesn't that take the cake! And who would you have to ask to find out, if you please?"

"Look! I can't tell you that, alright? Do you mind?" He tried to calm himself down. He tried to enunciate more slowly, more deliberately.

"I'm just not in a position to tell you. That's all. I'll do my best to get the papers back."

"You're not in a position to say," his father repeated, mockingly. By now he'd adopted a slight sing-song voice, as though he were lecturing a six-year-old. "You're just not in a position to say. Well, let me tell you the position *I'm* in, buster. I don't own that place, see? I'm what's called an *em-ploy-ee*. You understand what that means? And like everybody else I've got a boss who's going to ask me some questions about this monkey-business of yours, and unless I have something to say I'm going to be in a pretty fix. You got that? I've got a pension to worry about, fella, or don't you have any idea what that means?

Eh? Jesus, fella! I'm trying to level with you. Will you tell me where in tarnation those papers have got to?"

"A couple of union members have them. That's all I know. I'll get in touch with them and get them returned."

Norm sat back in his seat in stunned disbelief. He clapped the palm of his hand to his forehead and braced his head with his elbow on the steering wheel.

"Holy Moley, man, it gets worse every minute. You mean you let those apes into the building?"

Gilbert didn't have the inclination to say that they had let *him* in.

"You mean to say that you got into cahoots with that rabble? Tell me, are you daft?"

Gilbert sat rigid, stony-faced, gazing fixedly ahead of him.

"So you got them to let you into the building and open the safe for you? And now they've got that damaging bloody material in *their* hands? You realize what could happen if that stuff gets around?"

"Look, I'll get it back."

"Maybe too late you'll get it back. Did that never occur to you? Jesus man, you couldn't leave well enough alone. Right? Couldn't do it. You had to go and get your cockeyed fingers all over stuff that doesn't belong to you, spread it around to those stooges who you can trust about as much as weasels in a chicken shed, so god knows where it's going to end. And now what the *hell* am I supposed to tell Al Mercer? Eh? Or Art Mayberry, for that matter? Can you answer me that? And if my job is on the line for this, do you give a hoot, fella? Jesus! Do you have to be law unto yourself like that? Do you have some god-damned special

permission for that?"

Norm pulled savagely out into the traffic. Without exchanging a word they waited out a sequence of red lights — Dorchester, de Maisonneuve, Sherbrooke. Together they stared into the headlights of the approaching traffic and squinted into the occasional high beams, the sudden blind of light that came at them almost a relief for Gilbert. Furtively, he stole a sidelong glance at his father. He saw how the rim of his fedora creased his scalp and his hair in the same faint line as it always did, just over the temple. Then, without looking at his son, Norm expressed a long sigh.

"I've tried to tell your mother, fella. 'Keep what you build,' I said. 'Keep what you build. Keep hold of it.' Because you've got gangs of them out there that just want to take it away from you, pocket your property. And don't think it isn't happening right now, under your nose, guy, whittling away, little piece here, little piece there, all in the name of justice. I've seen it for years, man. Going on for years, always somebody like you wanting to help them out, teaming up with them, and then before you know what's hit you, there it is. *You've* got to take the orders. *You've* got to beg for the scraps and be extra special nice in case somebody decides to take offence, and watch what you say and bend over backwards so's your head touches your ass. Like — like a Quisling, man."

Norm's eyes flashed with redoubled understanding of the appropriateness of this.

"Like a Quisling!" he repeated, letting all the appropriateness sink in. "Well, not for me, Jack!" he said, turning towards his son. "Not

this customer! Stay in the driver's seat, I say, or you'll be in the back if you're not out on the street *al*together. And let me tell you something else. If there's one thing I learnt over the years it's this." Norm lowered his voice for emphasis as they came to another intersection. "You can't serve two masters, boy. You can't do it! *That's* history if you want to know history. Survival of the fittest!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Gilbert said. "What is this? The jungle?"

"Survival of the fittest!" Norm proclaimed again, as though the statement could brook no rejoinder. "You want to *make* something of yourself, man, can't you see that? You want to get *ahead*, get ahead, not get yourself waylaid and put off the track by that riff-raff. What for? What in heaven's name for, man? You see where it leads you!"

Norm fairly flung his thumb back over his shoulder in the general direction of where they'd come.

"That's the proof. Staring you in the face! Why in Christ's name do you need that? That's what I don't understand. What do you need that mess for?"

Gilbert didn't answer, didn't think he needed to answer, since his father's questions always seemed to fall uncertainly between rhetoric and familial concern. Besides, he didn't want to engage Norm in a sterile quarrel, not at any rate from a position of weakness, and so he stifled himself and kept his mouth shut. Norm, however, wasn't through. When he pulled up at the curb on Durocher, he looked over at his son again.

"You can't trust 'em, fella. That's what I'm trying to tell you. Like that government clown the other day, big cabinet fat guy who's been

hard done by, holds up a finger he broke in a fight 40 years ago in his streets with the *maudit anglais*, as he likes to call them. 'It's his reminder,' he says. His reminder! You can bet he's not about to forget it, either, the bastard. They're all cut from the same cloth, the lot of them. You'll see if they're not. So I'm telling you, guy, for the last time. Don't get mixed up with them. There's nothing *in* it for you. Keep your head up, or they'll lay the body on you so fast you'll be over the shoulder and flat on your fanny."

Gilbert pulled up on the doorhandle.

"Listen," he said, "I'll get that folder back for you as soon as I can."

His father paused a moment, then turned on him.

"You bloody well better get it back. What in hell did those bastards want with it anyway?"

Gilbert shook his head.

"They were just trying to help me out. That's all."

As he closed the door, Gilbert heard his father sniff sharply in contempt.

The Restoration

Chapter 16

It was well past eleven o'clock when Gilbert finally opened the door to his apartment. He snapped on a light and flopped, exhausted, onto a brown sofa. His head was still ringing with his father's voice; the night's events played themselves over and over in his mind, until it occurred to him to phone Suzanne Legendre. He let the phone ring at least a dozen times before he hung up and returned to the sofa where he sat for a half an hour, staring numbly into the dim light.

It took him almost that long before he realized that the place smelled. Behind the makeshift partition separating off the tiny kitchen, the dishes sat in the sink — two days' worth. He hadn't bothered to take out the garbage either. In the corner of the room and on the once splendid oak mantel, he noticed — not for the first time — how the dust had gathered, and he chided himself lamely for having let things get away from him. The Architectural history of the city of Montreal lay on the desk in the front alcove overlooking the street, the papers strewn, books, leaflets, small packets of photographs, rough drafts begun and abandoned; it lay before him in the light of a 40-watt bulb, in sudden unfamiliarity, faded, slightly depressing, messy, like the boot-tray near the door with

its winter collection of sand and salt that should have been cleaned weeks before.

He called Suzanne, again with no luck. Then, frustrated with himself, in a sudden private obsession, he threw some water into the sink and cleaned the dishes; he took a rag and cleared off the mantel piece; he soaked the boot-tray and straightened up the papers. He sat down at his desk deliberately, picked up a pen, and started to work. Then he gave up and went to bed. In the morning he would start. He promised himself he would start in the morning. But when morning came and he sat a little stiffly at his desk, it was only to riffle through a pile of photo-reprints, thinking again of last night's events, on the one hand trying to understand his father's vehemence, unusual even for him, the tone of desperate, even reckless obduracy that had begun to mark his warnings, and on the other avoiding his own hypocrisy, trying to use these images, as he so often did, to restore his sense of himself.

By accident he had stopped at a view of Sherbrooke Street taken more than forty years before looking west from the Ritz Carleton Hotel over the box-like cars on the roads and the fine mansard-roofed homes that had once lined the street. He lingered over the impression the photograph conveyed, the impression of calm, of spaciousness, of tranquility that would never be resumed. Was it the trees that did it, he wondered, confident, unsuperfluous tress lining the streets, down Crescent, down MacKay, full-leafed summer trees filling the tract of Peter Redpath's estate when Peter Redpath's estate still existed, trees moving their ranks up the sides of the mountain? And he imagined his father in the spring-time of his life, walking down Sherbrooke Street on just such a

fine summer's day as this, imagined him dreaming about one of those box-like cars, catching the scent of Redpath's trees, and being buoyed by a delightful city in a delightful time. Because that is what is would have been for a young son of Scottish immigrants of modest means, born on la rue de St. Valliers and now walking through this, his compatriots' Golden Square Mile — a delightful city made more delightful by the certainty — and certainty he would always consider it — that his own kind had built it, had endowed the museums and caused the churches to be erected, had owned and furnished and gardened the estates, the Ravenscrags and Beaver Halls, had bequeathed them to universities upon their passing, as they bequeathed their names to the city's streets. They had sent the smell of apple blossoms, like Robert Peel's, down from the side of the mountain and concentrated their vast disproportion of the country's wealth in this most wonderful of post-Victorian anachronisms, and somehow, over time, perhaps even then in 1936, his father had known that the estates were being wound down and sold, and Norm resented it. They had never been his, never would be his, but he had taken solace in their existence, and the less of them there were, the more he took it as an act of destruction on a larger scale and conceived his bitter, derisive spirit in reaction to it. That would account for Norm's vehemence as much as anything else, though it did little to assuage the misgivings of his son.

Suzanne Legendre phoned that morning. "*Félicitations, Gilbert!*" she cried.

"For what?"

"For the information! What do you think? The Ministry has the

documents, and they're going to get in touch with me as soon as they've had a chance to look at them. Isn't that good? Now tell me what happened to you."

"Oh, not much," he replied, offended by her off-hand manner. "I just had to get my father to talk me out of the clutches of the police."

"[illegible] mon dieu. Bruno said something had gone wrong, but when I called you last night no one was home."

Gilbert told her the story.

"I've got to get that binder back to the company, Suzanne."

"Of course, of course! I'm going to get it for you, but they have to photocopy the material first."

"I want you to explain the urgency to them. My father's in a very bad situation. Right now he's covering for me because he thinks I went in there just to get material for my research. When he finds out —"

"Don't worry about it. I promise that by noon you're going to have everything. I'm going to go to the office right now, okay? As soon as I hang up. Then I'm going to take a cab right to your place. You're going to be there?"

Gilbert waited, but Suzanne did not appear at noon that day. Instead she phoned again, this time to tell him she couldn't get the binder back to him before the following morning at the earliest; there were complications, unexplained.

Gilbert fell silent at his end of the line. Then he said, "I've made some promises, Suzanne."

She read his tone of exasperation.

"*Il n'y a pas beaucoup à faire, Gilbert,*" she replied. "*Je fais mon mieux.*"

"Who's got the file?"

"*Je ne sais pas. Un adjoint du sous-ministre. M. Nepveu. Péloquin, peut-être.*"

"Peloquin?"

"*Le sous-ministre.*"

"Why can't they just photocopy the stuff and be done with it? How long does that take?"

"I don't know."

It was her turn to fall silent. And as she hesitated, Gilbert realized how foolish he was being. Did it make any difference when he returned the material to his father? The management at Mercer-Granville would find out soon enough to what use it had been put, and then what was there to say? He could read in Suzanne's puzzled, momentary pause the question she was not about to ask. What else had he expected?

"You understand the guy's near his pension," Gilbert mumbled.

"Who?"

"My *father*, for Christ sake. Who else? He's worried."

"Don't swear at me Gilbert. I'm not taking his pension away from him. I thought you were worried about the building."

"Yes, yes. I am. I'm also worried about him."

"Well, it's only natural."

The Restoration

Chapter 17

Suzanne did not phone the next day, nor could Gilbert reach her. His father, as was his habit, stayed studiously silent, no doubt, Gilbert thought, waiting for him to make good on his word. He did get invited out to the West Island for a birthday celebration, Randy's birthday and his own having had the misfortune to fall barely a week apart. Adele, especially when Gilbert was in town, liked the efficiency of a combined dinner, where, among other things, she had occasion to exercise her reputable talents at invidious comparisons. The de Geer's new house had been the subject of last year's extravaganza, the size of the mortgage (only $22,000: Randolph de Geer's parents being well off and generous), the Roman bathroom, greenhouse kitchen with mud-room ensuite, the cathedral ceilings and slate vestibules — Adele's vocabulary. Such was the language of practical architecture, if only Gilbert would take the trouble to learn it.

It was she who had spearheaded the family's drive westward in 1953, six months after the abortive mortician, two years after their first car. She was moving up, out of the northeast of the city with its square-box duplexes and waves of strange-tongued immigrants, away from the

backward French with their dingy orange maple woodwork and their backyard junk sheds, away from the garbage in the lane-ways, out to the new developments along the rail-lines north of Pointe Claire — Saraguay, A Ma Baie, Roxboro. English developments. Bungalows. ("No stairs to climb!" Adele marvelled.) She took out a subscription to *Ladies' Home Journal* and brought her order home in the car from the shopping centers.

"In twenty years it'll be another Westmount," Adele had once bragged. However, Roxboro couldn't afford sewers — or paving for that matter, and so in the early years the roads were made of dirt and flanked by ditches, pot-holed dirt roads with sharp-edged rocks worn smooth by car tires and the August heat when the late summer wind would coat the windowsills and the fledgling spirea hedges with a dark, clay-like dust. Dirt roads and ditches, new grid superimposed on the old, the narrow-banded seigneurial fields dug out for development but still separated in spots by the centuries-old rock mounds and strips of bush moving east and west back to the heart of the island, back from the winding tarmac roads that had once linked the habitant villages, roads with names like Montée des Sources or Montée St. Jean.

However, because the populace couldn't agree on the language of public signs, the town of Roxboro had numbered all its streets and avenues. For twenty-seven years, Norm and Adele had lived on the corner of 17th Avenue and 17th Street, confusing visitors and deliverymen alike, but better by far than what the town's name commission had come up with in 1963, ten years after the Rollins had moved in and two years after the paving had been completed. Then the city fathers had decided to make the final switch to names: 65% English, 35% French, strictly according to

population. Only Norm had had the bad luck to fall into the latter category.

"Avenue de Marguerite de Bourgeoys," he'd fumed. "Now it's going to take half your bloody envelope just to tell people where you live!"

The whole scheme had been quietly dropped.

Adele now lived in the riverfront part of town, the older part once known as Ville St. Edouard. It bordered on la Rivière des Prairies, the Back River as the local English knew it, left arm of the St. Lawrence as it moved around the island of Montreal, sewage cesspool for the city, and one that regularly overflowed its banks in springtime, flooding out the lower end of town with its winterized summer shacks thrown up after World War II. Adele had bought on slightly higher ground, so most years the water wouldn't affect her — at least that was what the real estate agent had assured her after they'd closed the deal and she'd found out. But the agent hadn't mentioned the three or four days she'd be marooned in the house and miss work because the roads were flooded over and impassible. Adele felt cheated and told everyone, frequently. Gilbert twice heard about it over the phone. The night he arrived, the streets in the riverfront section of town had only recently been re-opened; large diesel-powered pumps still laboured on the lower lying properties, a trio of them chugging in front of a three-storey apartment building diagonally opposite Adele's place. She was wearing a long-suffering face when she greeted her son at the door.

"Isn't this great?" she muttered. "Water one week, ants the next."

"Ants?"

"Sure, ants."

Randy and Pam glanced up from changing little Emilia and smiled.

"I'm just going to show your brother our visitors," Adele called back. "There's one! See?"

Gleaming, a large fat-bodied ant made its way across the top of the kitchen sink. Adele grabbed a kleenex and lunged.

"There!" She dropped her charge into the garbage. "Oh, they give me the willies, those things. I keep thinking they're going to crawl all over me at night."

"But Mother, they won't really hurt you, you know."

Doggy-eyed Randy had come in from the rear.

"Oh, I know, I know. But you try sleeping with ants all over the place. It's bad enough with this water — which the agent *promised* would never affect this place. God, I was so *stupid*. What could have possessed me to think it wouldn't? I don't know what I could have been thinking about. And then with that racket these pumps make — *Warroom, Warroom, Warroom* — all night long. I can't sleep and I've got to catch a 7:30 train in to be on time. So last night I turned on the television, just to take my mind off things, and who's there with his face all screwed up and his bloody cigarette —"

"Who?" said Randy.

"Why what's-his-face..."

Randy looked blank.

"The premier."

"Oh!" he said, putting his head back and laughing.

"Didn't you feel reassured?" Pam called out from the living room.

"Reassured!"

"Well, didn't he say everybody'd have more money when they got sovereignty? After all, only one government to pay taxes to."

Adele snorted.

"Oh, sure. And what about this house? I suppose that will be worth *more* money when they get what they're after? And I suppose Dr. Williams will be able to afford to keep me on as the extra secretary because so many English speaking people will be moving into the province? And I'm sure to feel relieved when all the good people — the *professional* people — start leaving? What if I fall sick? I'm sure as hell going to have trouble explaining to a French nurse about my kidneys. I don't even know the word for kidneys. Oh, he makes me want to puke. Just last Friday I had to go all the way to Cornwall after work so I'd get there in time before the banks closed."

"What did you have to go there for?" called out Pam.

"To move my money, what do you think?"

"Oh, come on, now. You're not in any danger there, are you?" said Gilbert.

Adele was hurt.

"Well, that's easy for you to say. But I was talking to Magella at work the other day, and she said that if they win they could just freeze everybody's money right in the account. Can you just imagine the line-ups at the banks the day after? Better to be safe than sorry, I say. So I just put that money where they weren't going to touch it."

"Good for you!" called out Pam. "Did you hear that, Randy?"

Adele edged away from her son back toward the living room. Randy followed.

"I don't know what we have all that much to worry about, Pam. We don't really have that much in the account."

"We have *some*. And what about those Canada Savings Bonds your father bought us?"

But Adele interrupted them.

"You know, Magella was saying that anyone with any mobility was just daft to stay here what with all that's going on, painting out the English signs — and the taxes! I told your father that for years. Get out, I said, for the sake of the children if nothing else —".

Gilbert noticed Pam send one of her significant looks over in Randy's direction at just this point.

"But no. He was going to stay and fight. Oh, no, they weren't going to budge *him*. *Fight*," Adele repeated contemptuously. "And now look where it's got him. Even his old age cheque will come from them. Mine too, for that matter, if I work long enough to get one. What's the use. I suppose they can do just as they please, now."

"But they haven't won yet, Mother," said Randy.

"No, I suppose they haven't. Though it's probably just a matter of time like they say. Those English provinces certainly do look attractive now, don't they?"

Randy laughed, but Gilbert noticed Pam throw another of her significant looks in his direction and shush him.

And it wasn't until later over barbecued lamb chops and glasses of fizzy pink wine that Gilbert learned the reason for those looks his sister had been giving. Pam had news. She'd waited until after the birthday cake which read FOR OUR TWO BEST SONS in light blue across the

top and until little Emilia had fallen off to sleep before she sat down with a solemn look and made the announcement.

"Mother, Randy and I have put the house up for sale."

"What?"

Randy nodded confirmation.

"But you've just *bought* the place, for heaven's sake. Is there something wrong?"

"No, no. Everything's just fine. To be really accurate we're *putting* the house on the market after May 20th. Then we'll probably move to Guelph."

"You're kidding!"

Adele smiled in amazement; then it occurred to her that perhaps she might have reason for resentment.

"You mean to say here I was yakking my head off about moving out of the province and you've just about gone and done it?"

Pam's downcast look was the veneer on her triumph. She was one of the mobile ones, not quite professional yet, by anybody's standards, but soon to become so.

"Well, we haven't done it yet," Randy answered softly.

"But you're *going* to."

"Yes, I suppose we are," said Pam.

"But when did you decide this? Come on, tell me all about it!"

In her enthusiasm Adele quickly forgot her injury.

"Well, it's a lot of things, eh Randy? I mean we thought of Emilia and her schooling and where she could get a job when she grows up. She'll have to speak French *here*, and she'll never speak like a native unless

she goes to French schools — and then how am I supposed to help her with her homework? And what will her English be like? Already the neighbourhood around us is filled with French families — and if they're not French they're Italian or Chinese —"

"You're kidding!" said Adele.

"No, I'm not. I don't know how they afford those places. Though actually we *do* know. Both parents work and the houses are left empty all day, and the kids come home and hang around on the steps or else they're in daycare all the time. Not the best atmosphere for a child's development, *I* shouldn't think. And besides, who's Emilia going to play with when she gets a little older? That's another question. I mean I figure we've got to *think* of these things and not just fall into something or go along with things you don't really approve of."

Strangely, Gilbert felt the last remark directed at him, although he could hardly say why. He hadn't been accused of anything (or even addressed for that matter), and yet he found himself judged in his sister's unspoken way. Briefly his thoughts flew to his absent father.

"I've got nothing against Chinese or Italians," Pam declared, "but the last thing I want is for Emilia to grow up talking the way *they* do with their funny accents and their 'deezes' and 'dozes.' Like those northern New Brunswick kids who don't know any language."

"Well, that's *it*!" said Adele enthusiastically.

"And of course there are all those other things. So we thought, gee, Randy doesn't *have* to do his graduate work here, after all. And maybe instead of just talking about moving we should do it, eh Randy?" Almost as if on cue, she nudged him a little in the arm. "Go and get the

brochure from Darlington Acres."

Randolph got up from the table.

"Well, what's Darlington Acres?" asked Adele, her suspense tinged with pique, for she still hadn't quite forgiven her daughter for not having told her before.

Pamela's face had that look of confident repose of an artist who has mastered her craft. Lately, with Adele, her little rehearsals had worked flawlessly, and this time was no exception, even down to Randy's returning with the pamphlets almost in answer to his mother-in-law's question.

"Darlington Acres is just east of Guelph, Mother," Randy said. "Here. It backs onto the English Bay Game Sanctuary, see?. The lot we're thinking of borders right on the reserve."

"Oh, isn't that lovely!"

"If we get one," cautioned Pamela. "We'll have to make up our minds fast, that's the trouble... Do you want to see the models?"

They spent the next three quarters of an hour discussing brick patterns and the shape of staircases, the R-value of insulation and the his and hers offices they were going to have built in the basement for both Randolph's clients and her own — once she got her doctorate too, which she fully intended to do. There was the question of a family room and the choice between the Brittany fireplace and the Barcelona, of Devonshire dark oak parquet or something the brochure called 'Walnut Fudge.' There was the question of the lot itself, one at 84 Royal Brixton Way, the other at 63 Queen Anne Commemorative Road. There was even an appetizer for Gilbert: light granite exterior cornice work 'inspired by

the traditions of rural Ontario." Did he approve?

Gilbert approved, though for her part, Adele wasn't to be bested in so trifling a way. She had news of her own, which she carefully waited to reveal until after she'd set a fresh pot of tea on the table together with some of her favourite after-dinner mints arranged on a little silver tray with a lace doily. She had a demure look to her as she spoke, a certain lightness and hesitancy of manner which at her age she often substituted for spite.

"Oh, did I tell you Norm dropped by to see me the other day?"

"No-o-o," said her daughter raising her eyebrows and casting Randy another significant glance. This much had not been foreseen. Adele flushed a subdued flush of pleasure.

"Oh, it's not much, I guess, but I thought it was rather nice. When he didn't find me home, he drove up and down the streets looking for me. He told me he was worried about the water."

Pamela mused on this for a moment. She knew about the balding fellow who'd put too much after-shave lotion on; she knew about the man 'in computers' who'd drooled over Adele's organ playing and wouldn't leave until she danced the Samba with him. She'd even phoned Gilbert to tell him, but she hadn't counted on this.

"You're not thinking of getting back together, are you?"

Adele played with a kleenex momentarily and considered her reply. Then, deliberately, she turned toward her son.

"Would you like some more tea, Gil?"

He shook his head.

"Mo-*ther*!" cried Pamela.

Adele sat back in her seat and sighed.

"Oh, I don't know, Pam. Dr. Boll says I should just take one day at a time. So..."

She shrugged. On the other side of the table, Gilbert could see Randy nodding solemnly to himself.

The Restoration

Chapter 18

A red and white courier van delivered the Mercer-Granville file to Gilbert Rollins' apartment on Durocher Street at eleven the following Monday morning. Gilbert tried phoning Suzanne Legendre to get some information about the delay, but without success. Neither was his father in on Sacré Coeur when he called. His Uncle William told him Norm had gone over to the office, and when Gilbert finally did get hold of him, Norm, curt, judgemental, acted as though it were high time. There were more than a few matters to clear up, and he wanted his son down there on the rue des Récollets on the double.

"And just how am I supposed to go through your picket line?"

"Jesus, god, fella, this is still a free country, you know. You go through the front door like anybody else with business to do."

"As simple as that?"

Norm saw his opening here and he took it.

"I thought they were friends of yours, boy," he said. And when Gilbert fell silent, he pressed his advantage. "Don't you worry. Those hyenas are too lazy to do an honest day's work even when it's just parading around the street. You ring the front bell."

When Gilbert arrived, he had the binder in a brief-case. He noticed one lone picketer trudging somewhat forlornly up and down in front of the building. Two pickets were propped against the main door, and the façade had been spray-painted with slogans, in blue, in red -- ON EST TANNÉ, QUÉBEC LIBRE, MERCER FUCK YOU. Someone had draped a large OUI banner from the stone window-ledge on the first floor.

Gilbert took the long way round via la rue St. Pierre and approached from the rear. In the lane was the rest of the picket detail, about six men in all, playing ball hockey with a blackened tennis ball and some aluminum frame nets. By the time Gilbert made his way back to the front again, the lone picketer had disappeared. Gilbert rang the over-sized front bell, and after what seemed an interminable delay his father appeared at the door.

"So, boy," Norm said, carefully replacing the security chain. "The monkeys let you through."

"Not really. They're out back for the most part."

"Mm. I hope you saw the unholy mess they made of the front of the building there."

"Yes. Yes I did."

"Beastly pikers," he said under his breath.

The brass grating clicked into place as the elevator made its way slowly up to the third floor. Gilbert tried making some conversation.

"How long do you think they can hold out?"

His father looked back at him from over the top of his glasses.

"Fella, I couldn't give a tinker's damn how long they can hold out. How long are they going to have a job left to come back to? That's the

question. When are they going to start feeding their families instead of running around in the lanes? That's the question."

Gilbert paused for a moment, wary of his father's touchiness.

"Well, you must be feeling it, no?" he finally asked.

His father stepped back a little, just to let his son know this was sensitive territory.

"Of course we're feeling it. We're alive, aren't we? But we're not quitting on this one. No-sirree-Bob. This one goes to the finish."

Gilbert looked away.

When they reached the office, Gilbert placed the binder on the corner of his father's desk. Norm looked at his son without emotion. Then he leafed through the pages.

"Don't worry. It's all there."

His father looked up at him.

"And how would you know?"

Gilbert shrugged.

"I suppose I don't, really."

Norm nodded to himself and went on looking. Then he exhaled a long breath, got up, and fetched an envelope down from the top of a filing cabinet.

"This came in Friday's mail."

Norm passed the letter across the desk to his son.

"Maybe you can tell me what's going on?"

In the top left hand corner, the thick rag paper bore the blue and white embossed fleur de lys of the government of Quebec. It was addressed from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and informed the directors of the

Mercer-Granville Company that henceforth their property on la rue des Récollets would be considered classified as a national monument of the people of Quebec.

Gilbert pursed his lips as he read the pertinent paragraph and nodded a few times.

"Well?" said Norm.

"Well what?"

"Oh, come one, fella. You don't find it a little strange your getting these records back here and us getting this letter only a few days earlier? That wouldn't be coincidence, now, would it?"

"No. I suppose not."

"No."

Gilbert twisted slightly in his seat.

"I'm afraid the fellows helping me out passed that on to the government," he finally admitted.

"Oh. Is that so? And how in blazes did they know what to look for, eh? Who could have helped them with that?"

"Listen, if you think I helped them out directly there in any way, you're mistaken."

"Oh? It wasn't you in this very office who was telling me that this place could be turned into a cultural monument? You never said that?"

"If I did, it doesn't mean I helped the government build the case. They have historians of their own, after all."

Norm tapped the end of his pen against his desk blotter two or three times and looked away from his son.

"Jesus, god, man, you know what all this means, don't you? It means

"Al Mercer, Donoghue, and the boys have been in Vermont all week-end trying to come up with a way out of this mess, and you know who they're holding responsible. N.L. Rollins, Secretary-Treasurer — or should I say ex-Secretary-Treasurer..."

Gilbert waited a moment. Then he asked, cautiously, "Do they know about my involvement?"

His father looked down to the floor; then he glanced at a far wall and covered his mouth with his hand as he considered his reply.

"I didn't see the necessity of that," he said at last.

Gilbert looked down at the floor too, and for a moment both of them were silent.

"Listen," Gilbert interjected. "I don't see what all the fuss is about. The building stands, classified or not classified. You go on doing business the way you have for god knows how long. Where's the problem with all this?"

His father slowly shook his head as he listened to him and grinned sardonically.

"What do you know, fella, eh? What do you know about putting a business together and keeping it on its feet? One, two, three, pumpkin pie! Is that it?"

"Who said that? Who on earth said that?"

"One, two three, pumpkin pie!" his father repeated. "Well, let me tell you something. A business's got to have room to breathe, to expand, not to be sat on by a bunch of government wet hens. Are they going to pay fair market value for their 'cultural monument?' The hell they are. They're going to stick us with the expenses of keeping to *their* bloody

rules, which'll apply to any other guy stupid enough to buy this place, and they're going to come in nosing around every few months like they do with their god damned forms and statistics, and we won't be able to say so much as wait-a-minute without them bringing some regulation down on our heads. And where does that leave us, eh? Can you answer me that?"

Gilbert could not answer him that.

"It leaves us high and dry; that's where it leaves us. It leaves us at the mercy of those P.Q. beatniks you meet on the plane to Quebec City every week with their beards and their little gold-rimmed glasses and their fat school-bags packed so full of projects it makes you sick to look at them. That's where it leaves us!"

"Well," said Gilbert, as mildly as he could muster. "Surely economic considerations aren't the only ones here. The government has to assume its responsibilities."

If Gilbert had intended his remark to bank the blazes of his father's sulphurous temper, it had precisely the opposite effect. Norm looked as though he'd been slapped. His bitterness and anger came billowing out like the flames from a well-head gas fire:

"So the government has to assume its responsibilities! Well, doesn't that take the cake, now. And what about *my* responsibilities, eh? What about that? I'm 66 years old, fella; do you know what that means? That means Al Mercer can show me the door any time he pleases, thank you very much, and I won't have one bloody word to say about it. You got that?"

"Yes. I don't —"

"And do you know when they put in a private pension around here?"

Gilbert shrugged and shook his head.

"1963. Nineteen bloody and sixty-three, fella. So that gives me — count it — exactly seventeen years of pensionable earnings. Right? 17 years. And every year I work longer that figure goes up. Right?

"Now," said Norm, his narrowing eyes not quite concealing the almost lurid intensity of his frustration, "How do you think your mother's going to survive on the pension I'm going to get if I'm out on the street next week? Can you tell me that? When we just about made ends meet while I was working? What am I going to do when I'm out on the street?"

Norm said this with such passion that for the first time Gilbert realized how painful the prospect must have appeared to him. For a moment he was silent. Was there any use telling him he didn't have to worry about Adele any more when for Norm the pension was the one route he saw left to restoring his life? Gilbert hesitated, and then he ventured, gingerly:

"Well, I don't know if you have all that much to worry about. Mother's working, after all."

"How long? How long is she going to hold out, eh? Do you know? How long has she stuck at anything?"

It was one of the first critical remarks about Adele Gilbert had ever heard his father make, and yet it seemed strangely beside the point, a curious deflection from something more important that Norm seemed to have on his mind. Gilbert waited as his father, still drumming the desk-top with his pen, took stock of the situation.

"Let me tell you, fella," he said as he leaned across the desk. "You get your designated building out of this and I get my walking papers, and that's whether Donoghue finds out how much you were in on this or not.

No expansion, no room for N.L. Rollins, got it?" He picked up the government letter and waved it in the air. "But I'm telling you right here this stuff is not going to happen. No-sirree-Bob. We've put the monkey-wrench in their works before, and we'll do it again, mark my words. You'll see if we don't."

"And just what's that supposed to mean?"

"You'll see soon enough what I'm talking about, never you mind. And one more thing," Norm said, pointing his finger at his son as he pulled the binder on the corner of the desk closer to him. "Blood runs thicker than water, boy, and that's a fact. You bump your head up against that one as long as you like, but there's some of us here have learnt how to put family first."

"Oh, for Christ's sake," said Gilbert.

"Don't chrissake *me*. What the hell do you know, anyway? You got those hyenas out the back trying to sabotage the company, the same bunch down the river trying to break everything they can get their hands on, and you've creased your back-side from the fence-rail you're parked on, worrying about a bunch of old papers that're none of your god-damned business. Don't chrissake *me*!"

His father was standing up now, hands on his desk, leaning over at him, his forehead working with rage. Slowly, Gilbert got up. Trembling, face flushed, he walked out of his father's office. Behind him he heard Norm yelling at him:

"Easy for you, fella, eh? Easy for you to turn your bloody back!"

Gilbert stopped. Slowly, he turned round.

"Yes I'm turning my back," he said. "You're damned right I'm turning

my back. I'm turning it on your bloody-mindedness and your stupid categorical way of thinking and your pig-headed selfishness. When are you going to wake up to the fact that life is a little bit larger than your tiny corner here? Yes, this joint — this place ten years removed from Bob Cratchit and you treat it as though it were... I don't know what — the bloody Foreign Office, for Christ sake! And what's your mission? Keeping the natives in line? Punish them if they open their mouths? And if you blow things, you're not to blame? No. Always the other guy, isn't it? The other guy who's stupid and wants too much and horns in where he doesn't belong. The other guy whose voice is too loud and who can't see reason and wants two coffee breaks instead of one. And you're there like a god-damned drill sergeant to make sure he doesn't get it. Right? I mean come off it. You tell me why I shouldn't turn my back."

Norm was shaking his head and grinning his sardonic grin as he listened. That he'd even managed to get his son to reveal all this seemed to add to his victory.

"That what they teach you in that school of yours, fella? How to cut your own balls off?"

"Oh, *Je*-sus Christ!"

"You let yourself get stepped on if that's what you want, guy. Go right ahead, but one day the brick wall's going to fall on you and then maybe you'll wake up. If you don't have your brains beaten out first."

Gilbert shook his head in rage and walked toward the elevator. Behind him he heard his father yelling, "Blood's thicker than water, boy! Mind I said it. That's one bit of history *you* won't change!"

Shaken and embittered, Gilbert walked down la rue des Récollets to

St. Pierre, then east toward Carrée St. Jacques. Snatches of the quarrel would occasionally repeat themselves in his mind, but mostly he felt a kind of heart-sickness, as though he'd just been in a street-fight and had to kick and punch and have the side of his face scraped on the pavement. What was that sardonic grin of victory Norm had flashed at him? It took him a quarter of an hour of aimless walking before it occurred to him that his father was well aware of the contempt he had for the members of his own family, had been aware for some time. In his knowledge of his son's hypocrisy, of his intellectual hatreds now plainly revealed — hatred for his sister's foolish notions, for his mother's self-absorption, for Norm's own callousness — there lay the source of his father's power. And to know they all sensed the irony behind his smile and in his heart was to know, almost surely, that with every judgement made, a pole of reciprocal hostility gathered round him like particles of iron around a magnet. Underneath the shrugs, the casual handshakes, the inconsequential banter lay the stark ferocity of life. Norm knew that. Norm knew that openly, not secretly. So perhaps did everybody else.

Nevertheless, in the warm and lengthening light of mid-May, as he turned east along St. Paul Street and passed the renovated limestone front of Jacynthe Danielle's warehouse turned apartment building, Gilbert felt an almost secret elation, as if a painful crisis had been met and overcome. He could hardly explain it himself, given what had just happened, the dinginess of his personal life, the disorder of his work, the discord that seemed to stand on the very street-corners. Was it just the energy of life itself, asserting itself like a bud in the wind or a spirited dance emerging out of the long movement of trial and meditation? Or was it just

the knowledge that despite the passionate enmities, he was still free to walk the streets and breathe the air, think his thoughts and act on them if he chose? He stopped for a moment in front of Jacynthe's building, and the long vista of waxed floors that joined living room and dining room together in her apartment appeared to his mind. He imagined her there, with time to feel and experiment with her feelings, to taste and smell and arrange books and fabricate flowers, to be if not selfish, then entirely herself, and fleetingly, but for the thought of Matthew, he was tempted to race up the stairs two at a time and ring her door-bell.

Instead he turned back up St. Pierre Street and walked toward Durocher, working off the tension of that morning's confrontation and wondering if his father had been right. Maybe he *had* been meddling, judgemental. Maybe he had no right. Then, as he passed a news-stand on St. James, he caught sight of the headlines and pulled up short. Quickly he bought himself a couple of newspapers, *The Gazette* and *Le Devoir*, and sat down in a restaurant over a coffee. The results of the latest opinion poll were out. They put the OUI side narrowly ahead, 52-48%, and the front pages were full of the story. As Gilbert sped with increasing consternation through the editorial analyses, some cautious, some ecstatic, he felt a sudden granite stone of impotence sink to the pit of his stomach. He could hardly believe what he was reading. What would he do? What would Norm do? Or his mother for that matter? As he looked out the window of the café, even the possibility of that victory seemed to turn streets and buildings long familiar to him into something slightly alien and strange. He laid aside the newspaper and stared glumly ahead.

"Keep what you build," he heard his father saying, and he saw his

angry, threatening face leaning over the office desk at him. "Keep what you build!" And somewhere inside himself Gilbert realized that over the years he had been turning to architecture as a bulwark against the very fears of dispossession he'd fallen prey to now — because architecture was permanent, because architecture had foundations, because architecture didn't change and turn against you. "Some of us here have learnt how to put family first," he heard Norm say. And if, like Adele, the people of the province decided they wanted a new house, one all their own, how useful would his private obsession with the layers and blending of architectural history in the *Couvent des Recollets*, or in the city itself, for that matter, be? One more hymn to a dead idea, for which he had incurred his father's contempt and betrayed him unforgiveably. There was no escaping that fact.

To calm himself, Gilbert toyed for a moment with the idea of walking along St. James, from the Bank of Montreal building (circa 1817), west past the brokerage houses with their interior plaster work so intricately restored, past the old Molson Bank, the stock exchange building on la rue St. Gabriel, but all his imaginary tour did was to remind him how quaint and anachronistic this tiny, once powerful street really was, how it was very likely against just this — being consigned to the tour books and the museum keepers — that his father had unconsciously fought, believing as he did that the decision centers had begun moving long ago, up the slopes of the mountain to the corner of Dorchester and University, then on to Sherbrooke Street or west and south to Toronto and New York. Gilbert gathered the newspapers, folded them under his arm, and walked back to his room where he set to work trying to put some order into a

chapter on the architecture of the city's early convents. Thoughts of Suzanne Legendre and of his father's bitter, recriminating look kept intruding. A breeze blew in, unseasonably warm, from the window overlooking a ragged court-yard at the rear, where a gaggle of sparrows quarrelled over the land-lady's, Mme. Aubin's feeder. Gilbert found himself pacing up and down the short length of the room from desk to stove, then back to desk when the telephone rang.

"Congratulations, Gil!"

It was Matthew Oates.

"For what?"

"For standing up for what you believe in, among other things. I happen to think you've achieved a splendid victory."

"Well, thank you, Matthew, only things are so complicated I hardly know how I feel about it all."

"Is there some problem? You sound very down."

"No, no. I don't mean to. It's personal."

"I see..."

"Well, you must be encouraged by the poll results?"

"Yes. Yes, of course, but these things can be terribly misleading at times. We're not above suspecting a little federal collusion in that — panicking voters who're opposed to us and that sort of thing. There's a good deal of evidence to suggest it. But I haven't phoned to gloat over the polls, Gil, and I can't stay on the line too long without wrecking my budget altogether."

"Oh? You're in Quebec City?"

"Yes. I'll be following the minister out to Hull shortly. At any

rate, I first want to assure you that Tétrault from Cultural Affairs will leave publication of your discovery entirely in your hands, though for legal purposes the ministry will have to do an investigation of the Mercer-Granville place — based on the information we've received, of course."

"Of course."

"The research grant stands, naturally, and Tétrault wants to know if you'd be prepared to serve on a supervisory body to oversee the application of the department's regulations to the building — stipend included."

Gilbert paused a moment before answering.

"No, I can't, Matthew," he said. "I really can't."

"Why not?"

"Because me father's involved. He's very upset over what's happened."

"Oh?"

"No, you'd have to know him to understand. It would put me in an awkward bind."

Matthew murmured something sympathetic.

"Well, if you've nothing better to do, let me at least get a press card over to you for the 20th. Paul Sauvé Arena? Win or lose, we'd love to see you there."

The Restoration

Chapter 19

For its victory celebration the YES side had rented an arena named after the first premier of Quebec to succeed Maurice Duplessis. It was a relatively new building, having opened in 1960 at the beginning of *la révolution tranquille*, 16 years before the accession to power of the Parti Québecois on November 15, 1976. By the standards of local political mythology, that was the celebrated date, celebrated enough for provincial cabinet ministers to name their pleasure yachts after it. Now, almost four years later, May 20th had dawned blue and cloudless and warm; Gil Rollins cast his vote in a church basement off Prince Arthur street, secure in the pathetic fallacy that the weather confirmed the new trend in the polls — away from the government side. By 7:30 that night the T.V. networks had projected officially what everyone expected — a solid federal victory.

Two hours or so later when he entered the arena with its ranks of chairs on the playing surface, the milling crowds, the raised dais festooned with fleurs de lys and a large scoreboard that no longer bothered with results, Gilbert couldn't help being struck by the sombreness of the mood and the contrast with the ecstasy that had reigned there a

little less than four years before. Then that very arena had rung with the shouts of a huge and unexpected family party. With every riding won, young men had cheered and waved giant blue and white flags. Girls had danced in the aisles, celebrating their unity, their sameness, celebrating themselves. The speeches over, one man, half-drunk, rode the top of a car through the streets shouting, *"On est libre! On est libre!"* and believing it.

But May 20th, 1980 would have no pleasure yachts named after it; the same delerious youth, beside themselves with hope and pride in 1976, now stood broken and tearful, consoling each other in small knots, sullen, bitter. A television set mounted on the wall showed the occasional scan of the victorious NO side's headquarters in Verdun, a sparse, directionless crowd in an almost empty auditorium. Here, further east, people waited for the premier's address, that night's last clutch at vindication and defiance. A small cheer went up when one late-reporting riding went majority YES, only to be replaced by boos and groans when the voice over the public address system corrected the figures. The loudest boos of all were reserved for the results from the west-end anglo ridings, Westmount, Cote St. Luc, The Town of Mount Royal, all overwhelmingly NO.

About twenty minutes after he'd arrived, Gilbert noticed Jacynthe Danielle by herself in the area reserved for the press. She seemed elegant and thoughtful seated there a few rows in front of him, a little out of place in her gray muslin summer dress, and for a while he just gazed at her and tried to piece her small and beautiful and carefully made-up features together with the surroundings. Then he went over to her.

"Hello, Gil! How nice to see you."

"How do you feel?" he said off-handedly as he sat down beside her.

"Pardon me?"

"Well, you know..." He motioned with his hand around the arena.

"Oh." She hesitated. "I don't know."

"You're not ecstatic. I can tell."

"No. Relieved. Maybe a little sad."

Gilbert raised his eye-brows, but she didn't elaborate.

"What does Matthew have to say?"

"I haven't spoken to him, actually. He probably doesn't know I'm here."

"Oh?"

Jacynthe fell silent for a moment, and while Gilbert had tact enough not to press her, he had too little to know what to say next. Instead he stared out at the crowd.

"Are you happy?" Jacynthe asked.

"I'd be lying if I said I wasn't. I'm just trying not to show it."

She smiled.

"Listen, Gil, I came to visit you a few nights back, you know."

"You did? When?"

"Sunday night."

"Really. Why didn't you let me know, for heaven's sake?"

"I should have. I've been meaning to talk with you."

"Oh?"

"Yes. Things I've learned that might be of interest."

"So you're going to keep me hanging, are you?"

"No, no. I don't mean to. It's just that they're a little bit

delicate."

"I see."

He looked away. She seemed suddenly nervous, vulnerable.

"Let's wait until after he makes his speech, all right? Maybe we can go somewhere."

When the premier made his way to the stage, accompanied by his wife who bore a small rose in her hand, the underlying sullenness gave way to tribute, to admiration. Here was the man who had almost done what many in preceding generations had only secretly hoped. He had fought openly, aggressively; he'd said things they hadn't dared say, changed their vernacular, given them voice, effect, almost power. "*N'est-ce pas une défaite qui a l'air d'une victoire?*" The words of another occasion, nine years before. He wouldn't say them again, didn't need to. His people rewarded him anyway, even more in defeat than in victory. The applause, the heartfelt cheers gathered for ten solid minutes, while he stood shrugging, smiling, feigning the start of his speech, withdrawing it, with an uncanny instinct for his larger role in the history of his cause, protracting for as long as possible, allowing this release that gave the illusion of triumph.

"*Merci... Merci... Mes chers amis.*"

Finally an opening remark that caught, like a tiny silver ball in a hole, and the applause ceased.

"*Mes chers amis.*"

They listened while he conceded, thanked them, chided them for trying to boo the mention of his rival, buoyed their spirits by saying "*A la prochaine!*" (thunderous cheer), and led them into the first verse of the

nationalist pop-hymn of the day, hesitantly (because they didn't want to sing), deliberately, like a high-school teacher — "*Allez. 'Gens du pays...' Allez.*" Then it was over. The tearful knots regrouped. The sense of let-down returned. In the crowd at the exits Gilbert heard one middle-aged lady remark to her friend, "*Qu'il est fin, lui, hein?*" while a group of youths mocked "*le Referen*-dumb."

Gilbert and Jacynthe made their way across Boulevard Pie IX. Already the beginnings of a demonstration could be seen taking shape along Pie IX. There was some singing, some confused shouting. Police cars moved quickly off the curb into the traffic. Every now and again Gilbert looked over at Jacynthe, pensive and pre-occupied, walking silently beside him, and he wondered what it was she wanted to say to him.

"I'm kind of sorry we didn't try to find Matthew in there."

"Oh, I'm not sorry, Gil. I think that might have been very awkward."

"Oh?"

"Yes. I'm afraid I've learned a good deal this past week to have made it so."

"Such as?"

"Such as the fact that Matthew has been conducting an affair with Suzanne Legendre for the past two months."

She announced this so flatly Gilbert wondered if she were warning him not to pry too much further. He walked quietly with her beneath the streetlights for a few moments before he turned to her.

"Did he tell you this?"

"Oh, in a manner of speaking. My darling sister, bless her, took it upon herself to investigate him — another 'renaissance' sort of thing

her group feels obliged to engage in every now and again for the good of mankind. They apparently decided that Matthew was an agent of the British-Vatican nexus. It's the phrase she's using now."

Gilbert shook his head.

"I can't believe it."

Jacynthe laughed bitterly.

"Oh yes. I shouldn't have gone tonight. It was just petty vindication on my part. Just to be there, asserting my presence. I don't feel the least bit better for it."

Gilbert said nothing.

"Such a lovely evening for betrayals, isn't it?" Jacynthe looked up at the sky and breathed the air. "That's what Matthew thought I was doing. Betraying him. Undermining him. To listen to him you'd think I'd *sent* Melanie on her expedition."

A bus, spewing its fumes, interrupted her train of thought. Behind it were three cars with youths waving flags from the windows. Groups of people from the arena caught up with them at an intersection, talking heatedly at times. On the warm evening air, their voices seemed to carry over the sounds of the traffic.

"If I betray him, he betrays me. It's really quite simple. I was too independent. *Excessivement indépendante pour mon indépendantiste.* Besides, my darling sister had more than investigation in mind. They would go wherever he had a speaking engagement — cégeps, church basements, that sort of thing, and try to embarrass him."

"Embarrass him how?"

"Oh, publically asking him if he'd straightened out his relationship

with the Catholic Church. Making wild accusations about organizations he'd belonged to, conferences he's attended. Did people know he was financed by the Brotherhood of Malta? Things like that. They'd get themselves thrown out of meetings. As long as there was a commotion. Anything for a commotion. And Matthew was so anxious to make a good impression, not to look like a liability. He's desperate for a nomination. And then all this. You can imagine how he felt."

"I can't believe this, Jacynthe. It's grotesque."

"Grotesque," she repeated, laughing. "That's it. In some places it's perfectly normal. Just think."

She fell silent till they reached the car. Gilbert sensed how tense she was; some inward energy seemed to propel her forward. He found himself closing the door on his side of the car with almost exaggerated care.

"Did I sound bitter to you back there?" she asked.

"Bitter? I don't know..." He started the car.

"I'm not bitter. I think it's humourous, really. Wonderfully ludicrous and funny. Do you happen to know why Suzanne Legendre was so anxious to help you out with that old building of yours?"

Gilbert flinched a little.

"So you know all about that?"

"Oh, Gil, it all came out. Matthew was delightfully chivalrous and contrite and self-righteous as only he can be. Suzanne knew the value of a cause, don't you see? As, of course, I didn't. Enough to get him to finally break with the church, too. I'm sure she must feel quite triumphant. Anyway, Matthew wanted me very much to understand. It was

my short-comings. He didn't use the word. But what else could I expect? If he was committed and I wasn't, what was he supposed to say at all those cocktail parties with his friends and allies? They had their girlfriends and spouses behind them, and I must have been *such* an embarrassment. I wasn't reinforcing every word or filling in the extra argument he might have overlooked just at that moment."

Jacynthe leaned back and smiled almost at the roof of the car.

"Gil, Suzanne Legendre wanted those papers because they implicated Lucien Bolduc in a kick-back scheme with Mercer-Granville."

Lucien Bolduc. Gilbert remembered the flourish of curlicued capital letters at the bottom of the Mercer-Granville letters.

He looked over at her skeptically as he drove.

"Oh, it's true. Bolduc directed municipal contracts for stationery and office supplies towards the company in return for I don't know what — money, probably — and of course the city never did anything about classifying the building. Then just last week Bolduc was putting pressure on other people to come out on the NO side in a sort of eleventh hour decision. Very top municipal people, if you see what I mean, and what with all the talk about Olympic scandals and the possibility the provincial government would back some prosecutions, there was a good chance he was going to get what he wanted." Jacynthe shrugged a little. "So Suzanne got to shut him up and reach an agreement."

"An agreement?"

"I suppose you could call it that."

"What kind of agreement?"

"I don't know, Gil. Classify the building. Cut out the kick-backs.

Keep quiet during the referendum campaign. Maybe the provincial government doesn't prosecute. Something like that."

"Did Matthew tell you this?"

"More or less."

Gilbert shook his head.

"I can't believe it. It's so sordid."

Jacynthe fell silent.

As he drove, Gilbert would every now and then smile and shake his head to himself.

"That makes me look really good in all this, now, doesn't it."

Jacynthe glanced over at him.

"I mean, what *utter* hypocrisy."

"Whose?"

"Suzanne's! Matthew's! That research grant. Those noises about architecture, about collaborating on a film. The whole thing. It's sickening when you think about it."

"Oh, I don't know. I'm sure Matthew thinks he was doing you a favour, Gil. I know he thinks that. Suzanne would too. After all, the building is going to be classified, isn't it? What more could you ask?"

She was teasing him a little, and Gilbert looked back at her slyly.

"Should I trust *you*?" he asked.

"Me! Oh, I'd be very careful about me, if I were you."

They drove in silence for a while down Boulevard Pie IX. From time to time, Jacynthe would tilt her head back and stare out the side window, then turn pensively toward the front.

"Do you ever think about stars, Gil?" she said, all of a sudden.

"Stars?"

"In the sky. Those stars."

"No. I can't say I do. Why?"

"Oh, nothing, really. I read about them sometimes. One day I'm going to get a telescope."

"Oh?"

"Yes. I'm going to put it out on my back verandah and be a star-gazer. Especially when I can't sleep."

Gilbert laughed.

"Pills could cost less money," he said.

"I see you don't want to be a poet tonight. That's all right. Did you know they were always moving away from each other?"

"What? Stars?"

"Yes. Galaxies, really. But they're just lots of stars. Always moving away, faster and faster. That's what they say in the books." She paused for a moment. "It's funny. They start by attraction, dust and gas. All of a sudden they come together in a big explosion, and then they spend the rest of their lives moving away from other stars, faster and faster."

"Well, I suppose. Does that bother you?"

"No. Not really. I just thought families are a bit like that, aren't they? Your parents come together and there's a big explosion — maybe a little one, I don't know. And you get your brothers and sisters, maybe just one — for me it's one — maybe five or six, and then they spend the rest of their lives moving away from each other, faster and

faster. Until they just disappear."

Gilbert thought of Mélanie. He thought of Pamela, Adele. "So. You think it's always like that?"

Jacynthe thought for a moment, and said, "Maybe, I don't know." Then she seemed to drop the topic, only to return to it. "Eighty per cent of all stars are paired stars. That's a fact too. Did you know? One star orbits around the other. So they must come together as they fly apart, no? Things come together as they fly apart. Only you don't know for sure what's happening when or whether it should happen or not. That's life, anyway."

"That's life, is it?"

"*Oui, mon cher Gilbert*," she said, laughing.

And when they reached her place, Jacynthe said simply, "Come up with me. I'll make you some coffee."

Gilbert glanced over at the curb.

"I can't park here," he said.

Jacynthe looked around.

"Why don't you put it in the space down the street and I'll go on ahead. Is that all right? Come on up when you're through."

For a while, before walking the block or two back towards her building, Gilbert Rollins sat in his car, looking over toward the restaurant in Youville Stables and thinking about what Jacynthe had told him. He could imagine Matthew and Suzanne together discussing him, discussing Jacynthe too, for that matter, deciding on strategy, smiling over innuendoes, judgments in the knowing way people with a certain power and education come to acquire. He wondered if he'd been stupid not to see

before how he was being used, and he tried to pinpoint exactly where he might have guessed.

How interwoven everything was! How could Lucien Bolduc have known about papers misfiled, about his own research; how could he himself have reckoned what Matthew moved through, the tight skein of political imperatives? They lay behind friendships, marriages, social intercourse at every level. People were people, it was true, but they were also useful, always useful in some way that ought to have made him wary, wary and cynical and jauntily humorous towards them and towards their approaches. He should have been more cynical, he told himself; he should have read the signs. That desire to drop behind the lines of people's defenses, just to accept them with ease and simplicity — he should have taken that and stuffed it into the back of a drawer like an old shirt.

When he got out of the car and started walking, he felt strangely relieved. He could smell a peculiar smell in the air, something heavy and slightly tangy and sharp, and he wondered where it came from. It was one of the delights of so disparate an area, so many odours in the air, sometimes the smell of spice from the warehouses on la rue St. Pierre, sometimes on cloudy days the smell of malt and hops drifting down towards the river from the breweries to the north and east. On that late evening the air was warm and still, and as he stood outside the doorway of her building listening to the sound of the traffic, in the distance a siren, for a moment he thought of Guy Pouliot, Bruno Carrier, the mezzanine of ruined seats that looked down at him that night in the Mercer-Granville building. Then he stepped inside. At the top of the stairs in the light that streamed from her doorway Jacynthe was waiting for him.

"Did you find a spot?" she asked.

"Oh, yes. No problem."

She smiled and retreated to the kitchen, while Gilbert looked around once again at the front room. There were the stone walls stripped, the stone fireplace at the center, lithographs to either side; there was the yellow rocker, the same inwardness and charm, selected and worried over, almost precious; only without the people of that earlier January night, Jacynthe's place took on the added grace of stillness. And when she came back with a small tray and sat down on the couch beside him to pour him coffee, he noticed she paid no attention to the distances between them; he noticed that she didn't cross her legs and tuck her skirt underneath her and hold herself erect in the seat and talk to him in a business-like way; he noticed that she looked at him with a kind of warmth, and he wondered as he sipped his coffee who it was that said not men but women did the choosing? It was women who chose, as she had chosen this moment, and when she finally turned her face towards him, with the kind of warmth and appeal that he had seen, and when he finally kissed her, not without hesitancy, even awkwardness, it was the difference of her that surprised him most, the thin, rectilineal line of her nose, the curious texture of the lip-stick on her lips, the frailness of her shoulders beneath the gray muslin summer dress, not full but beautiful and slight and above all different, a whole warm being complete in that remarkable difference from which she perceived the world and lived out her life and which he now began to know like a breath of the perfume along her neck.

"Jacynthe," he said.

Then just as suddenly she whispered, "Gil" to him, and when he

persisted, she said, "Gil" again. He drew back from her and looked at her questioningly, but she made no attempt to answer, and for a moment he began to wonder if he'd misunderstood her. He moved away from her, stuck his legs out in front of him, and thrust his hands deep into his pockets. They sat silent that way on the couch. Finally, without looking at her, staring straight ahead with his hands curled in his pockets, he said, "That's what they call teasing, isn't it?"

Her answer was measured, unoffended.

"Don't say that, Gil. You don't understand."

Then she put her hand on his arm, rigid, self-protective under his sweater.

"What's there to understand?"

"A lot, I think."

She squeezed his arm to get him to look at her, but he wouldn't.

"I don't want to behave badly to you, Gil. Really, I don't. I like you too much for that. I don't want to use you to get back at Matthew, don't you see? I don't want to even start. And maybe I just did, I don't know. I don't want it to be like that, that's all."

"Maybe you just want nothing between us. Is that possible?"

"I didn't say that."

He stared straight ahead, sighed, and nodded two or three times. Then he said, "So what does the astronomer call this? Coming together or flying apart?"

She smiled a little.

"Oh, I don't know. *Il y aura un temps pour embrasser et un temps pour s'abstenir d'embrasser. N'est-ce pas?*"

"Tu crois?"

"Oui, je crois."

Gilbert shrugged.

"And now I suppose I finish my coffee and take myself off, is that it?"

"Mais, Gilbert, voyons-donc."

She came up to him and gently kissed him. As she did, he caught the scent of her perfume again and ran his hand down the side of her hair.

"Maybe now is a time to refrain from embracing for a while, no? That's all." She looked at him fondly. "Come on," she said. "I'm going to turn on the news."

He hung back in the front room for a moment with his coffee in his hand until he heard the radio in the kitchen. Then he followed Jacynthe in and listened to the announcer reporting on the spate of violence that had broken out in the aftermath of that night's vote — store windows broken, mailboxes overturned, the five-alarm blaze at the strike-bound Mercer-Granville offices in Old Montreal which police suspected might be connected to the referendum result. When Gilbert remembered the smell in the air outside Jacynthe's apartment, he said, almost to himself, "It's on fire," and when she didn't seem to comprehend, he repeated it. "Come on!" he said, almost as though he'd begun to understand himself. "It's on fire!"

The Restoration

Chapter 20

Gilbert hardly waited for her. He ran to the corner of St. Paul and St. Pierre. Normally they were deserted at this time of night, but now there were extra people, hurrying as he was, in cars, many on foot. He had to dodge the traffic. As he approached la rue des Récollets, Jacynthe behind him, he quickly looked back. The smell of smoke had become almost unbearable. Still he could see nothing of the fire. He was forced up to Notre Dame, then west until a strangely reflected orange glow, then the full vista appeared at the top of la rue Ste. Hélène. He stood staring for a moment, then heard Jacynthe's voice, breathless, amazed, behind him.

"*O, mon dieu!*"

Top to bottom, the entire Mercer-Granville building was aflame. The courses of stonework mounted upward toward the darkness merely to contain those flames, to give them shape and channelling. From where they stood two blocks away, they could hear the dull thud of an explosion, then another from one of the lower floors, chemicals or inks perhaps, that for some moments in their burning stained the flames from the bottom windows with a brilliant greenish hue. The explosions prompted some desperate

movement from the crowsnests atop the stair-way like ladders of the trucks posted at the sides and front of the building. Four men piled out of a tall square-backed vehicle parked nearby and rushed a container towards the trucks. The streets were alive with canvas hoses, some flat, limp, others pulsing visibly to the pull of the pumper motors, their polished steel connections sending jets of water, like sea-animals, sideways from the hydrants and sometimes six to ten feet into the air at the center of the road. Police cars blocking off the adjoining streets spread another shade of glare red into the night, but as yet no cordons had been put in place and people moved about, behind, in front, just as they pleased.

Mindful of the small explosions, Gilbert and Jacynthe edged closer to the building. In the searchbeams and the flames, they could read the smudged grafitti spray-painted across the stonework at the front. By now, yellow-bluish flames were thickest on the eastern side, where three streams of water played and were swallowed by the building, quenching nothing. Gilbert looked over at the hydrant, then back to the topmost stream of water where it met the stonework from overhead at the abutment of wall and roof. Like a chainsaw, the water pounded into the seams of the structure, sending a cumulus cloud of smoke and steam high into the night wherever it hit. A wave of heat glanced off his face. Jacynthe's eyes and cheeks seemed to glow unnaturally. They inched back a little, and as they did Gilbert pointed to the upper corner where the flames from the roof seemed to have worked themselves down the wall, to emerge almost from behind the stones.

"I think that façade might be in trouble," he remarked.

"Where?"

He pointed again. For about five minutes they watched to see if the volume of flame from behind the stone increased; then they heard the voice ordering them back.

"*Reculez! Reculez s'il vous plait!*"

Cordon in hand, two policemen herded them towards la rue Ste. Hélène and sealed off a broad swath of the diagonal from the corner of the burning building right through the intersection of Ste. Hélène and la rue des Récollets. As the crowd retreated, he felt Jacynthe press closer to him and slip her arm under his. When they stopped moving, they found they could no longer see quite as well.

"Come on. We'll walk around the other way," Gilbert said. He turned with her, and then he noticed the cream coloured zippered jacket, the familiar peaked cap. His chest tightened strangely. Not ten yards off his father stood, contemplating the segment of the burning building still visible from that angle, a smallish figure, strangely diminished by the circumstances and the night and the crowd. Gilbert knew he had seen him, though Norm pretended he hadn't, and even when his son approached, Jacynthe slightly behindhand, Norm seemed to brook no introductions and only deigned to recognize his son from the corner of his eye.

"So, your friends have done themselves proud tonight, eh?"

"What do you mean?"

Norm smiled bitterly and kept looking straight ahead.

"I'd like to know what you mean by that?"

"Pretty easy to figure out, fella, isn't it?"

"I don't see how."

Norm nodded stubbornly. He'd seen Jacynthe, and his sense of decorum

wouldn't let him start a ruckus in the street, so he leant a little closer to his son and exploded in a hoarse whisper:

"You don't see how when it's as plain as day, man? Can you put two and two together? Those bloody Doukhobors running around in the lanes out back day in day out, they don't know how to use a torch when they've got the inclination? They'll be going nude in the streets next, the stupes."

Gilbert took a moment before he replied.

"Have you got one shred of evidence to support those accusations? What possible good would it do them to burn down the building? They're just burning up their jobs, for god's sake!"

"You're telling me that, fella? Tell *them* that! Did they care two hoots about their jobs for the past six months? Eh? Oh, no! They've got to make a show. They've got to *protest*! Damn well cut off their noses to spite their faces, that's all, bloody destructive apes." He looked up quickly to see if anyone was listening, then leant even closer to his son's ear. "And you see that, eh? They finish one show this very god-damned night — and you think for Jesus sake there'd be enough damage done there for a life-time, *I tell you* — but, oh no. *A la prochaine*, it is. *A la prochaine*! Well, here's your bloody *à la prochaine*, fella."

Gilbert just shook his head. Sirens blaring, three more fire trucks arrived at the western end of la rue des Récollets. To allow them through, policemen had to cordon off the crowds at that end of the street as well. Groups of slickered firemen, sulphur-yellow gas-masks trailing on their chests, hip-boots folded down at the top of their thighs, pressed through the people towards some trucks parked on Notre Dame, and for a

moment they separated him from Jacynthe. Two others moved through, helping a stricken comrade toward the oxygen cylinders in the emergency truck. Then, from behind them Gilbert heard a voice call out.

"Norm! Norm, come on. I'm scared!"

He looked back to the top of la rue Ste. Hélène, toward where a non-descript, kerchiefed figure stood with a look of pleading on her face. It was Adele. Gilbert turned toward his father.

"What's she doing here?"

Did he have the right to ask such questions? Norm's diffidence, his distant, measured tone conveyed that admonition.

"We were watching the results on the television," he said. "I wanted to come down and have a look here."

"No-orm!"

Then, just at that moment, Jacynthe touched Gilbert's arm.

"Look!" she cried.

Two streams of water shore through the seam of flame between wall and roof, and as they did the topmost course of stone-work listed precariously from the facing of the building, hung inert, suspended for a brief second at its moment of crisis; then, as a midpoint in the structure shuddered and snapped, a full quarter of the front wall toppled as a unit into the street.

"*O mon dieu, il y a quelqu'un! Je suis sure qu'il y a quelqu'un!*"

Jacynthe clutched onto Gilbert's arm and tried to stand on her tip-toes. Adele arrived and, propping herself on her husband's arm, tried to do the same. As she glanced nervously at her son she said, "Isn't it awful!"

Gilbert nodded. For a second, the thought of introducing Jacynthe to them crossed his mind, but the noise and confusion seemed to work against it. From the corner of his eye, he saw a yellow ambulance backing slowly toward the burning rubble in the street.

"Is somebody hurt?" his mother asked.

Norm Rollins looked down at his wife.

"Some poor s.o.b. probably too close to the building," he said.

Adele could see a body being laid out on a stretcher, then loaded into the rear, heard the thick 'chunk' of the back doors closing, like the sound of an expensive automobile, saw the tandem asymmetric lights begin to flash, the quick turn, lurch to a stop, lurch forward again, then to a practice touch of siren, the vehicle gun itself up the road.

"Norm, please. Let's go."

Norm pretended not to notice. She tugged at his sleeve.

"Norm, I'm frightened."

Compliant at last, he turned. Adele threw her son a commiserating glance, almost apologetic. Fleetingly, she smiled to Jacynthe, and when she was part way to the sidewalk, she held her fist to her ear and dialed the air with the finger of her other hand. Gilbert gave her an exaggerated nod to show he understood.

And it was only after his parents had left that he realized how tightly Jacynthe had been clinging to his arm. He could almost feel the print of her nails beneath his sweater, and he looked at her inquiringly.

"Do you want to go too?" he asked.

"No, no," she replied, yet she remained fixed on his arm for the further quarter hour they spent there on la rue Ste. Hélène, watching the

flames and the streams of water until another sinuous rippling seemed to possess the brick wall along the eastern side of the building, then a shuddering, like the contractions of a digestive tract, a rumbling, as an explosion of brick and mortar and flaming timber spilled itself into the street. Beside him, Gilbert could feel Jacynthe's body almost quake with the impact.

"Maybe we should leave," he said.

She made no move to resist. They pushed their way through a crowd that was pressing almost uniformly forward, back the way they'd come, skirting the smoke and fumes by going further east toward la rue St. François.

"Do you think it's a total loss?" she eventually asked.

Gilbert, who had fallen into a morose silence, looked up at her.

"I'm sure it is."

"What a shame. Really, I feel very badly about it. It was a beautiful building. You... You must feel very sad."

Gilbert nodded.

"I suppose I do," he said.

"Do you have any idea how it started?"

"None. Of course my father thinks the workers did it."

"Oh, no! You can't be serious!"

"I pay no attention to him, but that's his theory, ludicrous as it is."

"But why would they *do* that? It doesn't make sense."

"I don't know. Revenge. Protest. He was making those kinds of noises."

"Oh, I hope not. Really. I hope not. That would be the worst possible thing."

As they walked, once again she slipped her arm under his. And before he left her in front of her building, he told her he thought she was a good friend, *une vraie amie*, he had said, foolishly, a little sheepish for the sentiment, and he had kissed her lips, her eye-brows, the side of her nose, and smelled the trace of smoke that had mingled with her hair, the odour heavy and slightly tangy and sharp, a trace of smoke that was by now hardly different from the air around them.

The Restoration

Chapter 21

The next morning, when he went back to the old quarter, Gilbert told himself it was to check on the Mercer-Granville fire. He knew Jacynthe was busy. He knew she would be busy much of the day, but that didn't stop him from taking the long way round via St. Paul so he could pass by her place anyway, just to see. Green trees, grey limestone, a sky Jacynthe had once told him you saw only in northern latitudes, in Finland maybe, fresh blue, chilly blue, sunlight that knew its limitations, gleaming off leaves and cobblestones and the rainbow, oil-slick breasts of pigeons. For a moment the proportions of things seemed to resolve themselves around him, and with the sounds of the city in the distance, it felt good just to stand and breathe.

Four streets to the north and east, the image of desolation. A back-hoe was cleaning rubble from a blocked-off area on la rue des Récollets, bricks, stones, ruined beams, little charcoal brickets blistering their six inch facings like a strange blackened alligator skin. The building dripped, from collapsed floors, from the remains of walls. In the far corner of the theatre, where the flames had been less intense, Gilbert could see some of the huge rolls of paper, scorched and water-

logged. The mezzanine of seats was gone. The entire facade was being shovelled into the back of a purple dumptruck marked 'Gidéon Laviolette' on the driver's side.

As he went closer, Gilbert noticed a man eyeing him, but he paid no attention. He traced round the perimeter of the building, then climbed up over a mound of debris so he could get a better look at the walls. Parts were still standing, and when he followed the lines they made, occasionally gapped by spills of stone and burnt, twisted furniture, he knew right away what he was dealing with. The interstices, the narrower, irregular perimeter jutting suddenly southward toward the rear - almost certainly the wing the Anglicans added in 1847 — here were the foundation outlines of the *Couvent des Récollets* intact, fully revealed. He was certain of it. Even the virtual rubble-wall masonary confirmed it: and parts of these walls, stripped now of their overlay, except where the window embrasures were bricked up — parts of these walls were intact to nearly eight feet in height. He wanted to get inside the wreck to follow the outline of these inner walls more closely. About three quarters down the front of the building there seemed a good spot to enter, but as he climbed over a small mound he dislodged a few rocks and then heard the man calling to him from over near the back-hoe.

"*Aye! Ote-toi de d'là, là!*"

Gilbert looked back to see the look of irritation on the man's face. He got down off the pile and walked over to him.

"*C'est très dangereux, là,*" the man said, as Gilbert got within ear-shot.

The man seemed almost to apologize for the tone he'd taken, and

Gilbert tried to explain his interest. He was a researcher. Those walls had great historical value. He was about to explain more when, oddly enough, the story seemed to have more immediate effect than he could have hoped.

"*Donc, c'est M. Tétrault qui t'a envoyé?*"

"*Qui?*"

"*C'est pas M. Tétrault qui t'a envoyé?*"

Gilbert shook his head. The man switched to English.

"It's because there is — how you say that? *Une enquête, là?* Just the police can get in there and a guy from the government. Here. I show you."

He reached into his pocket and fetched out a letter, neatly folded. Across the top of stationery from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs he read, in French, 'Authorization for purposes of ministerial inquest,' and at the bottom it was signed Georges F. Tétrault, *recherchiste en chef, adjoint ministeriel.*

"You got one like that?"

"No, I don't," said Gilbert.

"Ah."

The man shrugged and looked away.

"Supposed to have one," he said.

The back-hoe had started manoeuvring very close to them.

"Okay," said Gilbert, looking up. "I'll see if I can get one."

The man seemed relieved at this easy agreement. Gilbert took another look at the mess of devastation, circled back a bit to check the walls again, just to confirm his intent, then ventured east toward Boulevard

St. Laurent. Something was up. If Tétrault was involved in some sort of ministerial inquest, then it stood to reason he was aware of the effects of the fire. Be cynical, Gilbert told himself. It probably meant Tétrault would claim credit for the discovery, too. Why not? Leg up in the ministry, readier access to journals than graduate students, government research 'at his disposal,' to quote Matthew Oates. Why not? Gilbert smiled to himself as he quickened his pace. The least he could do would be to confront Matthew over this. Matthew the earnest, Matthew of the crucifixions. Gilbert wanted to talk to him about being a pawn in *his* political machinations. He wanted to know if Matthew thought he was being paid off with all that talk about films, about research grants, about supervisory boards, paid off for work he didn't even know he was doing. There was a word for what he'd been. There was a word that described his situation perfectly. That word was sucker.

The offices of the *Ministère des Affaires Culturelles* were located in the restored residence (circa 1690) of ambassador Alfred Joncaire on the corner of la rue St. Paul and Boulevard St. Laurent. Beneath a brown canopy stood the grey painted slat-wood doors, windowless. Gilbert entered, breezed past an uncertain receptionist and made his way up a hallway stripped to the stonework just like Jacynthe Danielle's, only here there were white track-lights and white gyproc ceilings, small bits of oak woodwork and nameplates on the doors, Georges F. Tétrault, *recherchiste en chef*, *Salle des Conférences*, Matthew Oates, *adjoint spécial*. Just as he was about to knock, Suzanne Legendre opened the door.

"Why, hello, Suzanne!" Gilbert said.

She seemed startled, then got hold of herself as she greeted him

with a knowing smile.

"Well, if it isn't the famous Gilbert Rollins!"

Gilbert noticed there were no soft g's. It was Gilbert now, anglo, slightly hard. He did a bit of a double take, but Suzanne retracted nothing.

"I suppose you're looking for Matthew. Well, he's not here. This morning he left for Quebec."

"Oh." Gilbert looked away a moment. "You heard that Tétrault has an inquest going at Mercer-Granville?"

"Yes, I heard that, Gilbert. And you want to know why, is that it?"

"Yes. Of course I want to know why."

"Maybe it's because Tétrault is going to find out about that building once and for all. Maybe because he's going to do something about that building, that's why."

Suzanne looked at him spitefully, aggressively.

"Look, what's the matter with you?" he said, trying to be mild in return. "You know my interest in that place."

"*Oph.*" She laughed. "I know your interest. I know your god damned interest, Gilbert. And you're standing there telling me you don't know Pouliot and Carrier got arrested last night?"

"Arrested?"

"Oh, we are so innocent, aren't we. We come around with our nice nice manners and our smiles and we're nothing but a piece of shit anyway."

"What the hell's got into you?"

"*Mange d'la merde, Gilbert.* You don't think I know who gave the cops those names? Who else? Your daddy give you a big pay-off, eh?

Tu m'écoeures, Gilbert. Vraiement, tu m'écoeures."

"Listen, Suzanne, I don't know what you're talking about. Arrested? Arrested for what?"

"For arson, *mon cher*. Arson! You ever heard of that? Burning buildings down?"

"I see. And you think I had something to do with that."

Suzanne looked at him with contempt.

"Well," he continued. "I just suggest you quit jumping to conclusions —"

"Oh, I suggest. I suggest. I hope Tétrault never lets you set foot on that property again. That's what I hope. And if you think that people are so stupid, that's your business. You think that if you want. But Pouliot and Carrier were nowhere even near that building last night, okay? And that's easy to prove."

"I —"

"And what's not so easy to prove is whether those big bosses of yours didn't burn that place down themselves. *Tu comprends? O, oui!* That's the easy way out for them, eh? A little bit of insurance money and then good-bye Charlie Brown! I should have known that's the way you work, *maudit salaud*."

Gilbert felt his eyes narrow, his lips press together.

"Oh, we're so self-righteous, aren't we, Suzanne. So bloody self-righteous. Just think. We're going to make a film. We're going to save that building — all old buildings! — from those wicked developers and goodness knows what other things we're going to do for the sake of decency and honour. And all the while we've got a neat little political

blackmail scheme going to help win our referendum, which also happens to be the cause of the good and the just, no? And if we happen to steal away Matthew Oates in the bargain —"

"*Tu m'écoeures, Gilbert.*"

She turned to walk down the hall.

"If we steal Matthew Oates that's another victory for the YES, right?"

Suzanne turned back and approached him.

"Do you know what you can do, Gilbert?" she said in a violent whisper. She came a little closer. "You can fuck off. That's what you can do. And if you don't like what's happening around here, you can always get out. That's a good option for you. Maybe that's the best option for you."

Suzanne Legendre marched down the hall, swinging her purse.

The Restoration

Chapter 22

Jean-Guy Pouliot and Bruno Carrier were released the morning of the twenty-first of May. Gilbert learned that from a brief telephone call to his father. As far as Norm was concerned, there were no other leads about the origin of the fire. Around the first week of June, through some contacts of Jacynthe, he also learned more about Georges Tétrault's plans for the Mercer-Granville building. In the archives of Quebec City, using the original walls as clues, Tétrault had managed to discover some rough sketches for the original *Couvent des Récollets*, sketches that had previously been thought to apply to an administrative structure further east on la rue Saint Dizier. Nothing was official, but it looked very likely that there would be a restoration under the supervision of the Ministry, though, of course, only of the original convent itself. The south wing that jutted to the rear, added by the Anglicans, would not be rebuilt. Instead, the land at the back would be leased, probably to European developers, for the construction of a small hotel.

Gilbert couldn't help smiling when he heard the news, and he wrote a mild letter of protest about the limitations of the Ministry's view of the building's history. He got back a reply, snippy if prompt, reminding

him that no restoration had as yet been decided upon, that in any event, since it was spurious (i.e. not built during the *ancien régime*), the wing he alluded to had no architectural significance, and that if considerations of historical 'layering' were to be paramount, in this case, the building would be restored as a warehouse and not as a convent at all. Gilbert thought of writing back and telling Tétrault that that was the attitude the Ministry had taken to the Van Horne mansion in 1973, that it, too, had been considered 'of no architectural significance,' worse, that it had been erected by a 'capitalist exploiter.' But he decided to let the matter drop.

Towards the middle of that month, Pam told him that his mother was planning a big get-together for the twenty-second, the occasion falling right on what the government had recently decreed to be *la fête nationale* (formerly St. Jean Baptiste), though that had nothing to do with what Adele had in mind. That Sunday happened to be little Emilia's christening, and, through his sister, Gilbert was informed that his mother had an announcement to make. She and Norm were getting back together.

"High time, wouldn't you say?"

"Oh, I don't know about that," Pam had replied. "I certainly don't think she's worked through her problems."

Gilbert let the subject drop, though he did tell her he would be bringing along a friend.

"Oh?"

"Yes. You don't think mother will mind, do you?"

"Oh, I don't think she'll mind at *all*," Pam cooed suavely.

Gilbert took in the innuendo. He didn't tell his sister how much he felt he needed protection.

Because the house was bigger, and because it was as much little Emilia's day as anyone's, the dinner was to be held at the de Geers' place in Dollard des Ormeaux. First there was the service at the church, a little suburban affair on Montée St. Jean with pastel doors and, since only recently constructed, still with a rutted dirt parking lot at the back. Gilbert and Jacynthe Danielle arrived late and took their seats in the rear, Jacynthe curious, amused, excited, for, as she had told him the day before, she'd never actually been in such a church before.

"No?"

"Catholic, of course, but never Protestant, really. Are they very religious, your relatives?"

Gilbert told her he thought not. But fed up with people coming to church only for ritual occasions (marriages, christenings *et cetera*), the minister had obliged Randy and Pam to take a series of Christian Fellowship Modules, as they were called, and to appear regularly on Sundays for at least four months before the christening could take place.

In what looked like a satiny, off-white, choir-gown, complete with pleats, a beaming Reverend Pilkie stood at the front of the church. It was filled to the brim with relatives and friends of relatives, for there were at least six infants to be christened that day. All through the process he kept up a steady patter like a morning radio-show host, little jokes about what baby looked like which parent, to the delight of the congregation, as he dabbed water on babies' temples and pronounced the magic words, stuffy, incongruous, powerful: "Laura Emilia de Geer, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." When the time for the sermon came, he asked the people if they

wanted to be excused from a sermon that Sunday morning, and as he saw a few grins and nods of the head, he gave them what they wanted, the grand finale, a performance by the new Canadian Junior Sacred Handbell Champions fresh from their victory in Sarnia, Ontario. A dozen girls in powder-blue gowns took their places behind the altar, a bell in each hand, polished to eye-aching brilliance, and as their leader raised her arms, they worked their way in unison, one bell ringing, then the other, through a flawless rendition of "When the Saints Come Marching In."

Norm was buoyant on his return to Randy and Pam's, as gallant as he could be to Jacynthe while he chatted to her seated in a big grey chesterfield, chipper with his son, radiant with his little grand-daughter as he dandled her up and down under the omnivorous eye of Randolph's movie camera. There was no political discussion, no comment about high taxes or the language of public signs. Even the subject of Mercer-Granville seemed off-limits, though Adele put a tiny chip in that taboo when Gilbert introduced her to Jacynthe.

"Weren't you there the night of the fire?" she had asked. And when Jacynthe said yes, Adele had simply replied, "Wasn't that an awful night!" and gone back to help Pam with the meal.

They finally sat down to eat at one o'clock in the afternoon — baked ham and more fizzy pink wine served in tiny cut-crystal glasses. It was Adele who first tinkled her glass with a fork and proposed a toast.

"I have an announcement to make, everybody," she said, trying on a declaratory tone for the occasion, though it hardly suited her. She was nervous and self-conscious, but she felt she had a duty.

"I'm sure most of you know that Father and I have decided to get back together." She looked a little uncertainly over at Jacynthe. "I've just thought over the past few months — when I see all my family together like this —"

She choked up for a moment and couldn't go on.

"Well, I just thought this was too wonderful to give everything up... So."

She took a serviette and wiped her eyes.

"Anyway, I just wanted to say that we have another bit of good news to share with you and that's that Norm's company is going to be re-opening in Kitchener, Ontario in four months and they want Norm to supervise the new office for at least two more years. So-o-o, daughter dear..."

Adele wiped her eyes again.

"It looks as though we're going to be neighbours."

Pam looked fondly at her mother.

"Oh, that's wonderful!" she exclaimed.

Gilbert thought immediately of the little insurance scam Suzanne Legendre had told him about. He looked toward his father, who sat there stolid and proud.

"Yes, and Lowell and Brenda are thinking of buying in Mississauga, so we'll all be an hour's drive from each other. —"

Adele caught herself for a moment and glanced awkwardly over at her son.

"Except you, of course, Gilbert."

"Well, he was *there* once," Pam piped up, coming to the rescue. "He had his chance."

This seemed to comfort Adele a bit. She reached for her glass and held it aloft, smiling through her tears.

"I just think we should have a little toast," she said. "To the next generation."

"To the next generation," Randolph repeated solemnly, and they all raised their tiny crystal glasses and clinked them together.

"Now," said Adele. "Would you say grace, Norm? I liked the way you learned it at Christian Fellowship, Randy. Could we do that? Everybody hold hands with his neighbour. Come on, now. I thought that was really *beautiful*."

Bemused, tolerant, slightly embarrassed, Gilbert took Jacynthe's slim fingers in one hand, reached round the corner of the table and took Randolph's thick ones in the other. They had all bowed their heads and closed their eyes, but Gilbert kept his erect and looked around. There at the head of the table his father sat, his face working with concentration, lips barely moving, as he tried to gather up the words. He muttered his prayer with almost hoarse-voiced intensity. "For all that we are, about to receive," he said, grateful, fulfilled, "we thank thee, Lord."